

Stories from a Year:

Looking Back on Cambridgeshire 1898-1989

A series of articles in the Cambridge Weekly News

Mike Petty

Stories from a year — 1927

Voices that linked two worlds

Continuing our series looking back on events of the last 100 years in which MIKE PETTY picks on an individual year at random. Illustrations from the Cambridgeshire Collection

IN January 1927 the first trans-Atlantic telephone call was received in Cambridge.

In it President Lowell of Harvard University spoke to senior members of the University of Cambridge including the Master of Emmanuel College which numbered amongst its old boys the John Harvard after whom the American college was named.

Newspaper correspondents reported the thrill of the occasion — akin, they said, to Columbus sighting land.

Base

They commented on the technical feat involved, the call travelling via Boston and New York, then "through the ether" to Rugby and finally down to the switchboard at the Cambridge telephone exchange in the usual way.

Reception was somewhat "mushy" but nothing worse than was often experienced in domestic calls.

Much of the conversation reflected the formality of the occasion, an exchange of greetings and ideals but

once others joined in more mundane matters were discussed.

It was Sir Ernest Rutherford who introduced the inevitable topic of the weather informing the New World that in the Old it had been snowing.

Though they had spanned the Atlantic in 1927 the Post Office experienced great difficulty getting through to Sandringham in January 1936. As news that the

King's life was moving peacefully to its close journalists flocked to the Norfolk estate.

They chose as their base the Feathers Hotel at Dersingham, its one telephone together with the one outside kiosk their only means of communicating the news to the Empire.

Engineers immediately set about providing the extra lines needed. Heavy snow had blocked all roads, the AA advising that no driver, however skilful,

Publicity for the telephone company in 1885



List of Subscribers to the Cambridge Exchange.

Those marked * are already in communication.

- South of England Telephone Company (Limited) Office, 5, Alexandra Street.
- Messrs. Fosters & Lawrence, Solicitors, Trinity Street.
- " Hallack & Bond, Wholesale Grocers, Clarendon Street.
- " ditto Soap Manufactory, New Street.
- " ditto Grocers, Guildhall Street.
- " Barrett & Son, China Dealers, 30, Market Hill.

An apology: These articles were written over a number of years and would benefit from editing. However I hope there may be something of relevance and that you will forgive the errors – Mike Petty

Mike Petty Stories from a Year - 1888

In July 1888 an important piece of Cambridge was sold by auction at the Lion Hotel for £5,400. Prospective purchasers did not have far to go to view the property for it was right beside the hotel itself

Numbers 8 and 9 Petty Cury included a double-fronted shop and four-bedroomed house, and printing offices let to Messrs Foister and Jagg. But the main property was the old-established fully licensed inn known as "The Falcon" with its bar, bar parlour, large smoke and billiard rooms, eight bedrooms and three attics. It came complete with the Falcon Tap with its bar, sitting room with six rooms above and cellars

Obviously a desirable property and of some antiquity, it had once belonged to Richard Kinge of Wisbech who had willed it in 1504 to the prior of Barnwell. Queen Elizabeth I is said to have stayed in a suite of rooms along one of the open galleries & to have watched Shakespeare or Marlowe performing their plays in the yard beneath. When here the university petitioned her to limit the export of corn from the town and so keep Cambridge prices low - a plea she rejected

She also courted disapproval by abolishing a centuries-old tradition, the Corpus Christi procession which involved a parade with the college Master carrying a tabernacle of silver-gilt containing the Host, the whole protected under a canopy. On the final procession that canopy caught fire as it past the Falcon – possibly caused by somebody deliberately "casting fire thereon out of some window"

By Victorian times however the grandeur had long passed. By 1850 it had become the most disgraceful slum in Cambridge. About 300 people lived in the Yard and "there are two privies for the use of the whole of the inhabitants, but as they are at a distance of fifty yards from some portion of the premises those of the inhabitants who have back windows to their rooms are in the habit of throwing all their refuse out of the windows on to a large dung heap in the Red Lion yard, the reeking steam from which is constantly penetrating the room"

One woman described the single room in which she had lived for 34 years, the bed "as big as an old pocket handkerchief" had to accommodate her husband and daughter as well. Another bedded down in a room with no light whatsoever, a candle revealing a black hole in which a pile of clothes on the floor served for bedding.

The stately galleries so loved by antiquarians had been divided into apartments let at rent varying from 1 /4 to 2/- per week and although several were remarkably clean "the majority are as wretched as it is possible to conceive". By 1885 they had been condemned by the Medical Officer of Health and the poor forced to find other lodgings

Redevelopment soon followed the sale in 1888, one side of the Yard being replaced by offices, while the galleried side was demolished for extensions to the old Lion Hotel about 1904. The design included an archway across the yard, a feature reproduced in the modern Lion Yard development whose large windows on the first floor recall the ancient galleries where once a Queen, then later many beggars slept.

Stories from a year - 1889

Not another new paper!

Such was the reaction that greeted the first edition of the Cambridgeshire Weekly News in February 1889

Not so long before there had just been the two old stagers - "Cambridge Chronicle and University Journal" for the Tories and the "Cambridge Independent Press" for the Liberals. Then in 1867 the Reform Act had increased the numbers eligible to vote, most of them urban working class people who were unlikely to be persuaded to pay 2d just for a weekly paper.

The proprietors of the existing papers had held the price despite the removal of the newspaper tax and the way was open for somebody to undercut them. So in September 1868 the "Cambridge Express" hit the streets costing just 1d and offering free and unbiased reporting. It was an instant success and by 1872 was selling 400,000 issues - a number previously unknown in Cambridgeshire newspaper history.

In 1884 the franchise was extended again and 2 million agricultural workers now had the vote. It was a market the political papers could not ignore and in the run-up to the impending election the "Chronicle" issued a new mid-week penny paper the "Cambridge Observer and County Guardian" to give undeviating support to the Conservative cause. It ceased once that party had won the December 1885 election

Early next year the Tories produced a successor. The "Labourers' News" would "expose the hypocrisy of sham friends of the labourer" (by which they meant their political opponents, the Liberals). The new journal cost only 6d making it the cheapest paper in the town.

This was the situation when in 1888 William Farrow Taylor defied all sceptics by issuing a Cambridge Daily News, using the latest technology and selling for only a ½ d. Its aim was to cater for all interests and classes and it would be neutral in politics. It soon caught on and based on its success he launched a new series of weekly papers

Thus it was that February 8th 1889 saw not only a "Cambridgeshire Weekly News" but also a host of other titles. There were Weekly News's for Newmarket, Saffron Walden, Royston and Huntingdonshire whilst Ely had a "Weekly Guardian" and St Ives a "Weekly Chronicle". People were encouraged to buy the local edition which allowed small towns better coverage though based on the same core content. It competed with the established papers in those areas and soon was rivalling the popularity of the "Daily News" itself.

In November 1889 the "Cambridge Express" was put up for sale by its owners. A new Conservative company was formed to take it over and soon the "Labourers News" ceased, urging its readers to switch to the "Express". By 1909 however its circulation had dwindled and amalgamation deals were discussed. The "Chronicle" was approached without success but talks with the "Weekly" bore fruit and the two amalgamated.

The new joint publication was to be "one of the largest and ... one of the best weekly papers in the United Kingdom" said Taylor who stressed its political neutrality and expanded his printing presses to cope with increasing demand.

The hardships of the Great War hit all newspapers; the price of newsprint rocketed, the amount of paper allowed was reduced. The "Chronicle" struggled through, the "Cambridge Independent Press" did not and it merged with the "Weekly" group in 1917. Still independent in politics it was the "Independent" title that the joint papers adopted as they battled for readership with the one remaining Cambridge weekly paper, the "Chronicle" until in 1934 that too became part of the Taylor empire.

There had been other skirmishes throughout the period. Two other daily papers had been published briefly, the "Daily Independent Press" in 1892, the "Cambridge Daily Gazette"

between 1898 and 1900. The latter had even produced its own weekly - the Cambridgeshire Weekly Gazette, and the "Cambridge Graphic" had also flourished for a couple of years.

In 1935 the "Cambridge Town & County Standard" appeared on the streets but failed to attract sufficient readers to ensure its financial viability.

In the 1970s new technology and market forces saw the growth of free distribution newspapers and ever alert to a changing world the "Cambridge Independent Press" finally reached the end of another chapter in its history. The title disappeared from newsstands in 1981 and in its place re-emerged the "Cambridgeshire Weekly News" with its sister titles.

Its proprietor had described it in 1909 as "one of the best weekly papers in the United Kingdom". Its modern equivalent was judged in 1988 as not just one of the best - but the very best. Long may it flourish.

Stories from a year - 1890

Cambridge councillors were anxious to expand the boundaries of their town and eyes turned to Chesterton, just across the river but still obstinately independent - though its residents easily crossed into Cambridge and made use of the facilities provided without contributing to the rates.

Suggestions for amalgamation received a cool response; as a dowry Cambridge suggested a new bridge making access far easier than the inconvenient ferries and far closer than the long trudge to Magdalene bridge. There was much local opposition but on a poll of ratepayers the idea was approved and an application for an Act of Parliament to build it (- and another as well, while they were about it) was successful, though the amount of land they could take for the controversial main road across Midsummer Common was restricted to two acres.

In September 1889 operations began; the Engineers appointed were Messrs Webster of Liverpool and Waters of Cambridge, the contractor John Mackay of Hereford. The superstructure was to be of iron and steel with 6 main ribs spanning the river at an angle of 105 degrees given a clear rise above the water of 14 feet six inches. Its main ribs would be wrought iron plate capable easily of taking the weight of two traction engines. Further details were specified - a length of 40 feet, footways of 7 feet width giving a roadway of 26 feet - ample room for the two widest vehicles to pass with ease. It was to use local materials where possible, to employ a number of local men, be completed within 10 months and the cost, including the road across the common would be £10,000.

It was November 1889 when the Mayor of Cambridge left the Guildhall, escorted by ten policemen, to join the Chairman of the Chesterton Local Board, J. Bester, on the site. Together they performed the ceremonial laying of the foundation stone, each tapping it with the mallets and silver trowels that had been presented by the engineer and contractors. Beneath the stone was placed a vase containing copies of the local newspapers, an account of the background to the new bridge, a copy of the act of parliament and a list of the people involved. The speeches over councillors and crowds dispersed leaving workmen to remove the bunting and decoration that had formed the backdrop to the occasion and continue the work of construction.

The planned 10 month construction period became extended to 15 and it was 11th December 1890 before the great opening ceremony could be performed. The proceedings were scheduled to start at noon but council business delayed the departure of the official procession of 13 carriages from the Guildhall by half an hour. They proceeded to the start of the new

road where a silk cord blocked their route. Mayor and Chairman formally untied the bow, named "The Victoria Avenue" and - to only feeble cheers from a few onlookers - proceeded slowly towards the bridge.

Here they found hundreds of onlookers, chilled by the weather and impatient at the delay, and another silken cord. Chairman declared the bridge open, Mayor named it and together they pulled at the rope from which dangled a bottle of champagne, intended to smash against the parapet in the traditional way. Sadly it was not to be - the bottle merely swung tamely and eventually had to be hurled by hand. The cheers that rang out were feeble in the extreme, the contingent of police had no disorder to contain except for a restive horse who contrived to break the shaft of his carriage. The official party walked across, then rode across and returned to the Guildhall, having duly declared the Victoria Bridge well and truly open.

They left behind a remarkable monument to forward thinking - a bridge designed before the age of the motor car that was to carry the weight of heavy lorries. By 1986 it was found to be rusting away and in need of urgent repairs which will take as long to complete as the Victorians took to build it. It will cause traffic chaos - but not total chaos - for that second bridge anticipated by the Act of 1889 was finally opened in 1971. Much longer, much wider and much more expensive Elizabeth Bridge will soon have to carry more of the burden of her older sister.

Chesterton incidentally welcomed the Victoria Bridge - but still declined to surrender themselves to the borough and had to be forced into the marriage, kicking and squealing in 1912.

Stories from a year – 1891

Darkness became a thing of the past in 1891 when a Cambridge firm, Baily Grundy and Barrett started the town's first public electricity supply from a dynamo in the basement of their shop in Gt St Mary's Passage. They only covered a small area around Kings Parade and Peas Hill but also charged accumulators for the University labs. Some people believed this was how electricity would be spread to outlying areas with accumulators delivered door to door along with the milk and papers.

The Company also supplied and installed private generators - including one in 1898 at Milton Hall - till recently headquarters of Eastern Electricity and Sir Clive Sinclair. Peterhouse had become one of the first places in the country to introduce electric lighting in 1884 when they installed their own generating plant which fed light to bulbs the equivalent of 10 watts - little better than candle power - with each bulb costing the modern equivalent of over £30. Their enterprise did not find favour with the laundry ladies who used to hang their washing on Coe Fen since smuts from the generating plant got on to their nice clean sheets.

The Cambridge Improvement Commissioners had been quick to appreciate the potential of the new invention and in 1889 had decided to try and provide a municipal electricity supply; almost inevitably chaos ensued and the enterprise failed.

Then in 1892 the Cambridge Electric Supply Company was established. Despite objections by Magdalene College they chose a site in Thompson's Lane and put in large steam turbines which they ran during the hours of darkness. Soon 10 colleges were connected and as business expanded and more consumers adopted the electric light the generators were worked continuously. Cables were laid, transformers installed, and bright ideas flowed - floodlights on Coe Fen allowed people to skate at night. St Paul's and all Saints churches saw the light in 1904 and although the tramway company suggested electrification of their lines and came to nothing the Cambridge Daily News adopted the new technology when in 1912 it became the first paper in the area to be printed by electricity.

By 1927 the spread of a net-work of power cables brought power from the Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire Electricity Company power house at Lt Barford to the edge of Cambridge, reaching the Observatory on Madingley Road.

Folk hoped competition would lead to a reduction in charges which in 1929 stood at 10d per unit for lighting or an annual service rate of 54/- (£2.70) per year which reduced the price to three-farthings (©p) a unit, making it economical to heat and cook as well.

Nationalisation in 1947 heralded the standardisation of electricity voltage from the 200 volts supplied by the works to the national 240 volt standard; it was to be 1972 before the last of the 35,000 houses had been converted.

As blackouts became the norm during the 1970s Cambridge had no alternative but to suffer; the Thompson's Lane station had closed in 1966, and in 1973 the plug was pulled on the firm that had sparked electrical storm as Bailey Grundy and Barrett ceased trading.

Stories from a year 1892 by Mike Petty

Respectable ladies, daughters and wives of professional men, were afraid to walk the Cambridge streets at night. They were worried not of muggers or criminals but of learned and senior members of the University. Time after time there were stories of how these clerical gentlemen had stopped and insulted them in the most gross and offensive manner, asking disgusting questions and subjecting them to brutal violence, purely and simply because they were walking unaccompanied in the street and did not happen to be known to the Proctor.

The University took its responsibilities for the moral wellbeing of its gentlemen undergraduates very seriously and there was no shortage of young ladies, attracted into the town by the prospect of numerous rich and lonely young men, anxious for female company. The Barnwell area became notorious as a haunt of loose ladies but it was the central streets that were most patrolled by the Proctor and his men.

They were armed with an ancient statute which gave the University power to arrest women "suspected of evil." Once detained they were taken to a grim building on St Andrews street erected as a workhouse in the 1600s and known after its founder as "Hobson's Workhouse". Here unruly and stubborn rogues were imprisoned and the poor set to work, spinning and weaving. It soon became known as "The Spinning House" changing to become principally a prison used by the University to imprison the prostitutes it arrested.

Conditions inside were investigated by "The Morning Chronicle" of 1851 who quizzed ex-inmates. They found it one of the most wretched and miserable places in the country. The building was dilapidated, the walls cracked and windows broken. It consisted of sixty cells about six feet by eight, each furnished with an iron bedstead, flock bed, two blankets and counterpane. There was no glass in the windows and in winter the floor of the cells was often covered in snow. There was no form of heating although new inmates were allowed a warming pan to air the beds if they had not been slept in for some time.

Prisoners huddled together talking, swearing and discussing their profession. . "The was poor ---; when she went in she was as modest a girl as possible for one of her sort to be, and she would blush when she heard any bad language, but when she came out she was as bad as any of us. She used often to say she got her education finished there. We call it 'going to college'".

Once detained by the Proctor conviction was almost sure to follow since the Vice Chancellor held his daily court in a private room, with no public or legal representation allowed and only

the Proctor and Gaoler present. The former gave evidence, the latter was asked whether the accused had been imprisoned before and if so the case was proved. Sentence could range up to three months.

Not all the ladies accepted their imprisonment quietly; some kicked and screamed, some planned revenge – one even locking the Proctor in one of the cells – others planned escape. One got through the window and fled to her parent's house at Dullingham. She was re-arrested on a charge of gaol-breaking but this meant the case had to be heard in public and attracted wide publicity – the University actions being likened to those of the

Stories from a year – 1893, by Mike Petty

6.11.1989

It was possible for the poor to avoid the restraint and humiliation of the workhouse, but it was difficult to do so in Cambridge because of the seasonal nature of much of the work available

The building trade was a traditional source of employment but, as elsewhere, could only be carried on when the weather allowed and was subject to periodic slumps. But Cambridge also looked to the colleges and for months every summer and weeks in the hardest part of the winter, when living expenses were heaviest, great numbers of college servants whose livelihood depended on the University were thrown out of work when the grads went down.

Schemes were set up to encourage the poor to save for the hard days that were to follow. The Post office Savings Banks had opened in 1861 and accepted deposits of any sum from £50 down to one shilling. But many had trouble saving up the twelve pennies needed to get to the minimum sum and although people could save penny stamps there was then a form to be read over and filled in, all in public view – which for somebody not too good at reading or writing was something to dread

That journey to the Post Office could be a chore for a busy mother when she had so little to deposit so groups such as the Prudential Insurance Company had collectors who went round to each house to collect the savings that could otherwise be frittered away. One woman put in £3 by weekly sixpences and during the hard winter when her husband, a painter, was out of work she had enough to pay the rent and keep the family in food, another having suffered chronic indigestion for years put aside enough to treat herself to a set of false teeth

Some of the collectors were University students, though some felt that many of their colleagues were setting a bad example – rich young men released from parental bonds spending money like water, wining, dining and gambling with little thought for the bills that were to follow – bills that could be settled by pater's cheque, drawn on his bank and by the 1890's Cambridge had two banks of its own.

One was Mortlock's which had been established in 1754 and developed into a successful business despite great personal scandal. In 1896 the banks amalgamated with Barclays

The second had been founded by Ebenezer Foster, a miller. He started his banking by simply issuing receipts to farmers who would exchange them amongst themselves instead of cash, trusting the Foster name as a guarantee that the bill would be honoured. The bank began trading in Bridge Street but in 1836 moved to the Turks Head Coffee House where security was provided by three junior staff who were obliged to sleep in the bank, one in front of the

strong room with his sword by his side. The bank prospered and the business passed down to his sons.

By 1890 the premises were too small and the decision was taken to move. The London architect Waterhouse was employed to design the new buildings and authorised to spare no expense. The construction was undertaken by William Sindall. It was to have a clock tower 100 feet high that would dominate the town centre from its position opposite the entrance to Petty Cury.

In November 1893 the new bank opened with a flourish and although in 1903 it amalgamated with Capital and Counties Bank and in 1919 was absorbed into Lloyds the Foster name is still carved into the stonework. Through the great entrance troop rich and poor alike, undergraduate and college bedder being accorded equal service in a way unthinkable at the time it was opened

Stories from a year 1894 by Mike Petty

This Christmastide much talk will be of the good old days when villagers knew everybody's name, and much thought will be given to the year to come. In Dry Drayton, Bourn and Bottisham parishes now scheduled by developers to be the lucky recipient of a new settlement unpaid councillors – shopkeepers, farmers, policemen will be preparing to spend weeks arguing the views of their residents against the smart-suited businessmen and their lawyers a the forthcoming Inquiry. Meetings will be held to draw up statements and work out lunch expenses for the battle ahead, not for them the £4,000 a day budget of the Developers' legal teams.

In Stretham and Wilburton however the councillors will be able to relax, knowing that their 3 year ordeal is over. Since December 1986 when the bombshell announcement that their area had been earmarked for a new town drew villagers away from Festive whist drives and into a school hall anxious for any scrap of information they had been endeavouring to learn of and comment on the proposals. This Christmas for them the last Government Inquiry will be over, their cross-examining complete, their views at last heard. They have nothing to do but wait for the decision.

This lowest tier of local democracy was established in 1894 by a Government convinced it was conferring beneficial self-rule on the countryside. It was in November and December that year that the first elections were held. Minute books were bought, meeting rooms arranged and ordinary folk debated ordinary issues transferred from the Parish Vestry to the Parish Council.

Mike the date is in RED as I do not know which year you intended this to be.

Stories from a year 1895 by Mike Petty

1895 was the year of the great frost. It lasted from January to March unbroken except for brief thaws; from January 18th to 25th there were snowstorms, floods and north-west gales with frosts of 15 to 20 degrees turning hundreds of acres of flooded land into skating rinks.

It was ideal weather for the sport in which the fenman excelled – speed skating, organised by the National Skating Association, which had been established in Cambridge in 1879. The

competitions started in December 1894 but the New brought racing at Littleport where 4000 people assembled to witness the 50-guinea challenge cup for which all the famous names were present. From Cowbit, Southery, Upwell and Whittlesea the skaters came to compete against southerners from Cottenham, Waterbeach and Landbeach. Then there were the outsiders from Walthamstowe and Leicester. There was also the foreign challenge in the form of the famous Hendrik Lindahl from Norway, reckoned to have been the best skater in the world before his marriage to an English lady. He had quit the sport until last year when he visited Littleport as a spectator and was tempted back on to the ice. Then he had beaten James Smart – but this year the Welney man got his revenge only to lose to F. Ward from Tydd fen at the finish.

Two days later they were back when A. E. Tebbitt of Milton became amateur champion but three days later those who travelled from London to witness the Hayes-Fisher cup were frustrated as ice had turned to water at Littleport. Swavesey men quickly telegraphed to report that their ice was suitable and at the end of the month they were rewarded when one of the most successful meetings ever held was skated on the finest of ice seen in years.

The preparation of the half-mile track with a barrel at each end and sides marked by swept-up ridges of snow involved much hard labour with men often working through out the night. Although the fen winter might be severe the work was warm and refreshment essential. One problem was that the beer supplied to keep the spirits up tended to freeze in the barrel and one worker might be delegated to cuddle it to keep the liquid ice-free.

In Cambridge three fields were flooded at Newnham and electric lights installed so that people could flock for the novelty of skating at night. Indeed so many responded that the Arcade Variety Music Hall, in the Old Corn Exchange, Downing Street, was forced to close. Not even Marie Lloyd could compete with Jack Frost.

In 1895 race followed race and the normal programme was soon completed so in February they decided on a special event: a skating race from Cambridge to Ely and back. Interest was intense and amongst those attending was W. G. Grace the famous cricketer. The entry list included men from Cottenham, Kettering, Haslingfield, Coventry and March.

In the event the starting point had to be moved to Bottisham so it was decided to make it a race from there to Ely, back to Bottisham and on to Ely again – a distance so it was said of 36 miles (although subsequent measurement made it something less than 30).

By the time they reached Upware several of the men of unknown reputations had fallen behind but the lead was being closely contested by a group who arrived at Ely in just 45 minutes. Turning back with the wind behind them they increased speed, averaging a mile in 2 minutes 50 seconds they reached the turn in 34 minutes 11 seconds. As they started the final leg the competition was between Albert Tebbitt from Milton, the Amateur champion and H. A. Palmer of Kettering, winner of an International race at Hendon earlier in the month. They skated side by side, fighting every inch of the way as they travelled once more past Upware, beyond the junction of the Cam and Old West and on towards the Cathedral which the winner reached just one minute slower than in the first leg.

In fact there were two winners – for the men could not be separated and crossed the line in a dead heat. Ten others followed them home – just half of the hardy souls who had set off on the greatest race ever held by the National Skating Association.

Stories from a year - 1896

For the enterprising Victorian a Kelly's county directory was as essential as any modern filofax. The Cambridgeshire edition issued in September 1896 was no less important than those that had preceded it, continuing the tradition of publishing at roughly five-yearly intervals since 1847 - a tradition that was to last for 90 years.

Compiled with the assistance of clergymen, magistrates, clerks, registrars and other eminent officials it provided everything one needed to know. Perhaps the introductory paragraphs were updated less often than they might be but the editors reported that in the fens steam engines were taking the place of windmills for pumping the water from ditches into the rivers and that the wildfowl were diminishing as their habitats vanished. Sedge cutting was reckoned to be one of the few remaining fen industries, a-

Although basket making, mat making and barge building was still continuing. Farmers were increasingly devoting large acreages to new crops such as potatoes with resulting increase in employment and improving the fertility of their land by spreading manure formed by burning lime whilst the coprolite works were said to be a major factor in the local economy.

The bulk of the Directory was devoted to the county's towns and villages. First came a summary of its location and facilities - "Cottenham is a large village and parish four miles from the Histon station on the St Ives and Cambridge branch of the Great Eastern Railway, 2.5 miles south-west from Oakington station on the same line ... Sawston "is lighted with gas, first used in November 1882, the sum of £104 being subscribed for the purpose ... the works erected in 1867". The parish church and nonconformist chapels are described, together with dates of restoration or erection alongside details of the agriculture, soil, acreage and population.

Not content with this Kelly goes on to detail postal facilities and the local school - Madingley's "National school (mixed) with house for the mistress, built 1844 ... will hold 46 children, average attendance 45; Mrs Mary Tennant, mistress". Then comes the directory - first the names of the "private residents (landed gentry) then the "commercial". Caxton's tradespeople included William Cox and Elizabeth Tasker shopkeepers and Charles Simpson harness maker. Villages were self sufficient - most had tailors boot and shoe makers, wheelwrights and blacksmiths together with dairymen, publicans and beer retailers. It can be a fascinating exercise checking their arrival and departure and wondering just how they could all have made their living in a small community and where their premises were situated in the village street

For those wanting a broader view of employment the classified trades section repay study. From "Abyssinian tube wells" (no local representative, though a London firm is featured) to Zinc workers (Mark Turner of 36 Bradmore street, Cambridge) all commercial life is there. Amongst those featured in 1896 were banjo makers (C.M. Wood, 3 Alexandra St), sausage makers (including Swann and Sansom, Sturton Street), umbrella makers (a choice of several in Cambridge with others in Wisbech and Whittlesey) and a waterproof cover maker in Christopher Gall of Lt Shelford. Display advertisements describe their services - Ernest Kett of Newmarket supplies pianos and American organs for cheapness and durability whilst D.J. Smith, ironmonger of Wisbech holds the patent for the "Turnip fly brush for destroying bug, beetle, caterpillar etc on growing crops"

By 1896 there were also a number of names of photographers. Some such as J.P. Clarke, Scott and Wilkinson and T. Stearn well-known, others like David Spencely of Littleport and John Simpson of Chesterton less familiar. Their views of life through the camera lens will provide the subject for a new series of articles with the hope that others can supply personal details of the men who recorded their present, for the future.

Stories from a year - 1897

Another Jubilee! Just 10 years after the celebrations for Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 it was time to start again - this time her Diamond anniversary.

What sort of celebrations should there be this time - and what sort of memorial should the money that was sure to be raised be actually spent on. It was time for another public meeting and for the ideas to be sorted out.

First in the list was Addenbrooke's Hospital - "no institution was of greater benefit to the poorer classes". But how about the District nurses - they looked after the poor in their own houses, a Nurses Home was needed in Barnwell. Surely the children should be looked after - why not rebuild East Road Girls and Infants school together with one of the British schools and make a donation towards a workshop for the Perse School as well. But the Friendly Societies in Cambridge numbered upwards of 500 members - the working men of the town - and needed to expand their Institute, the money would be well spent there and the medical and surgical equipment would have a proper home. Others felt that the Cambridgeshire Rifle Volunteers were a more needy case and needed a proper Headquarters and gymnasium.

Debate raged and in the end it was left to a Jubilee Committee to decide. Their suggestion of support for all the ideas, except the Friendly Societies Institute, prompted more discussion in the press and elsewhere. Why not give the money to the Addenbrooke's Hospital convalescent home at Hunstanton instead. In the end it was decided to support the District Nurses.

Now that was out of the way they could decide how to actually celebrate the great day. There would be two Processions; one starting from Victoria Avenue at 2 pm, another from Queens Road two hours later - this one including decorated traps, carriages and cycles. But the Friendly Societies - who were going to be the central part of the early procession took umbrage - who were the Committee to dictate to them, didn't they realise that there were certain procedures to be followed ... The Mayor apologised, tempers cooled only to flare again when somebody thought that the procession of decorated carriages - a procession of toffs - separate from the working men's parade - would set class from class; either they combined or the Friendly Societies would pull out. This time there was no compromise, one procession was cancelled.

Working classes could however participate in a decorated cycle competition with their own lantern parade and prizes for the smartest costumes and bicycles. This was the highlight of the celebrations, held on the eve of Jubilee day and attracting over 100 entrants, including ladies.

Jubilee day, 20th June, kicked off with a Royal Salute fired on Parkers Piece, a flight of 1,000 pigeons, sports on Midsummer Common with prizes of £3.00 for the winners. Then, to music from the band of the Yorkshire Dragoons, came the Procession of flower-decorated carriages along the Backs, with prizes too for the best decorated lady's and gentleman's bicycle. They joined the procession led by the Mayor and Corporation with the Fire Brigade and decorated tradesmen's vehicles which wound its way through the town, down Hills Road, Mill Road, East Road and back to the Market Place, passing Parkers Piece where a variety entertainment was taking place. A Water Carnival on the river and musical concert in the Guildhall filled the time until dusk when public buildings were illuminated before the great bonfire on Midsummer Common was lit and a gigantic display of fireworks on Parkers Piece brought to an end a memorable day, despite the squabbles that had threatened to spoil it.

Stories from a year - 1898

The death of General Gordon at Khartoum at the hands of the Mahdi in 1885 prompted a national outcry. The victory at the battle of Omdurman "where within sight of Khartoum stained with Gordon's blood the ruthless tyranny of the usurper was crushed for ever and the fair Province of the Sudan was restored to peaceful husbandry & opened to the commerce of the world" (as the Mayor of Cambridge put it) brought public adulation on its General, Horatio Kitchener. He was showered with honours and awards - made Baron - and in November 1898 he was in Cambridge.

His arrival of the 10.25 train was supposed to be a secret but somehow it leaked out. He was greeted by the Master of Christ's college and Alderman T.H. Hills before starting his carriage drive into Cambridge through streets decorated with flags and bunting and a few cheering spectators - the weather was blamed for the small turnout.

At Parson's Court, beside the Corn Exchange, a contingent of 50 members of the 3rd (Cams) Volunteer Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment were preparing to form a guard of honour for the distinguished visitor. At the due time they marched off to form up on Market Hill. The front of the Guildhall itself was barricaded, the vestibule smothered under palms and plants, the steps leading to the large hall carpeted and drapery covered the unattractive walls. The floor of the Hall itself was covered in crimson cloth, the councillors chairs had been removed from the Council Chamber and placed facing the stage on which was a table bearing a beautiful casket - especially designed by Mr G Munsey, the jeweller, in which lay the scroll conferring the Freedom of the Borough.

Everywhere else was packed with those fortunate ratepayers who had been able to get tickets. They thronged the orchestra and gallery - itself adorned with green and yellow drapery.

Then Kitchener was there amongst them, alongside George Kett, the Mayor whose speech was of great difficulties cheerfully overcome and the glory of the British Empire. The Freedom conferred it was the turn of their visitor - he was flattered - and he did like the casket. Then it was over and he was gone off to Downing College for lunch (though not before inspecting the Guard of Honour).

Whilst Mayor and Aldermen could relax another section of local life were getting excited. For next it was to be the turn of the University to honour the hero. Already Kings Parade was packed and undergraduates had taken their places high in the Senate House - where they found a hose pipe to spray water to cool the temper of distinguished gathering down below, already annoyed by chants and songs such as "The Soldiers of the Queen" repeated endlessly. Cheers from outside announced His arrival, drowning the cries of pain and distress of undergraduates crushed when the great railings around Senate House itself were pushed over by sheer weight of numbers.

Of this Kitchener may have been unaware; he could not miss the sight of one of his former enemies suspended from the gallery which greeted him as he entered the building - a second glance was needed to ensure that it was after all just an effigy. More speeches of praise - this time in Latin (and accompanied by undergraduate comments) - before the procession moved off, his carriage pulled by undergraduates as far as Christ college where a contingent of police could not prevent the crowds surging through.

Kitchener had yet another engagement - at the Union Society before he could relax over lunch. There was no relaxation for the undergraduates or the police as anything that would burn - hand carts, goal posts, fences from the Backs and much of the Christ's Pieces bandstand was ransacked to feed the flames of a Bonfire on Market Hill. Next morning the

centre had all the appearance of having been in the hands of a mob, many cart loads of debris being removed from the bonfire site.

Cambridge pulled itself together; Baron Kitchener moved on to other adulation and honours.

Stories from a year – 1899 by Mike Petty

No smoking on the premises" was the rule of the Y.M.C.A. in 1899 but it found disfavour with a considerable number of members who decided to petition for the ban to be lifted. The petition was refused and the organisers were asked to resign from the Association. This they did, being followed by many of their supporters. On the pavement outside the disgruntled band discussed their future. They were now free to smoke whenever they wished, they were no longer free to pursue their favourite sport - rowing - and would certainly not now be allowed in the Y.M.C.A.'s boat, as they had planned

Rowing as an Undergraduate sport dated back to 1825 when St John's college boat club was established followed shortly afterwards by the First Trinity. Soon other colleges joined the fray with the Cambridge University Boat Club being formed in 1828, challenging their Oxford equivalents for the first time the next year.

Racing side by side was not possible on the narrow River Cam so they adopted the practice already developed at Oxford, that of chasing each other and attempting to "bump" the boat in front.

This had tragic results in 1888 when an undergraduate was killed when the pointed prow of the chasing boat hit him in the ribs, which pierced his heart.

Four years later came two additional headlines when one of the rowers was lit by lightning during the May Races and the Lady Margaret boat arrived at the traditional procession of boats with only two oarsmen, other members of the crew being "sent down" for taking part in yet another tradition - that of the winning crew setting fire to a boat - not its fine racing shell, but an old one of little value - following the boozy bump supper'. The combination of events led to the abandonment of the procession in which the eights rowed down the Backs adorned with flags and flowers, ending up in a line across the river whilst crowds gathered on the lawns of Kings college to watch – allowed on the sacred grass for this one occasion.

It was not always pleasant to be beside the river for by 1868 the Cam was an open sewer with effluent flowing into it from the Colleges along the Backs, and combined with the smell from the Gas Works was said to improve competition - one had to learn to row fast to get past as quickly as possible.

There was even a tale that in 1852 when Midsummer Common was under some feet of water time races were rowed over the Common - but that one of the boats lost its rudder and shot between the legs of a horse waiting by a coal barge. It is said that the boat escaped without damage but that the horse was cut across its stomach - but whether by the bow or by one of the oars is not quite certain!

In 1868 various town clubs came together to form the Cambridgeshire Rowing Association in an attempt to improve the River. A subscription-list was opened, Queen Victoria gave £100, and agreement was made with the railway for *the* removal of the old bridge at Chesterton whose span was too narrow to allow boats to pass under. The improvements were much appreciated

All this was no avail to the debarred smokers. They called a meeting at the Mitre inn in Bridge Street on 2nd June and decided to form a club of their own, naming it the "Ninety

Nine" to commemorate the year - and a success for the University crew against Oxford after a period of reversals, They entered two crews in the Bumping races that year and soon demonstrated their mettle. In 1903 they ended up "head of the River" - a feat they might have achieved earlier had they given up smoking!

Stories from a year - 1900

It was a special New Year's Eve, the first of a New Century.

As midnight 1900 approached streets which on 364 nights of the year were solitary and deserted after 11 o'clock were packed. Throughout the town all forms of entertainment both public and private stopped, coats and hats were donned & shoes laced. All feet were heading for Kings Parade, feet of all ages for although the young predominated the middle aged and old were also there. They paced up and down the street while the century hastened to its close and although there was no unnatural solemnity about the gathering there was something in the demeanour of the crowd that proclaimed that it was no ordinary celebration. As the century got into its last quarter of an hour the crowd in front of Deck's the chemist grew even larger. Finally the door opened and the hero of the hour emerged.

Alderman Arthur Deck was one of the grand old men of Cambridge. He had been a town councillor for nearly 50 years, he was and an enthusiastic balloonist - but most importantly he was the Rocket Man. The elderly gentleman was greeted by cheers as he crossed Kings Parade to the open space in front of the College and prepared for the ritual that had been started by his father Isaiah in 1820.

As King's clock struck the first chime of midnight a rocket whizzed up into the night sky and everybody waited for the distant explosion and the pretty coloured lights that would follow. Then before the clock had finished striking up went the second.

The Twentieth Century had now officially arrived in Cambridge. It was welcomed with much shaking of hands and exchanging of good wishes, with the singing of Auld Lang Syne and rousing cheers. Then all adjourned to Deck's back parlour where steaming punch was ladled out with unsparing hand and the Alderman's health was drunk time and time again. Arthur Deck saw the start of 1908, but not its conclusion; his rockets continued until 1913, then Dora - the Defence of the Realm Act - forbade them for the duration of the war. In December 1919 those Cambridge people looking forward to a general return to pre-war conditions at the festive season were disappointed to learn that there would be no rockets to signal the New Year. Sometimes, Mr Deck junior explained, the rocket sticks caused damage when they fell and - perhaps more significantly - the crowd had been rowdy - things not to be tolerated in those days. So he had decided that his father's custom must not be his. It seems a pity said the paper - "there are many losses we could submit to with less regret than the loss of the rockets and the abandonment of a celebration which was based on good fellowship". It was the end of a chapter, but not the end of the story. In 1922 the custom was revived in response to continued pressure. But it was thought no longer safe to use Kings Parade for the launch and the ceremony transferred to Parkers Piece. Midnight found a thousand people assembled to watch the rockets. But it was not quite the same, numbers dropped off and people found other attractions in the town on New Years Eve. So it was that 1929 arrived uncelebrated by any rockets and one of the most celebrated of Cambridge customs fizzled out.

Stories from a Year, 1901, by Mike Petty

CWN 24th April 1989

The returning heroes on 6th May 1901 had many tales to tell of hardship and toil, of extremes of climate, long marches and occasional action. Little did they know that their worst danger was yet to come

The Volunteers had responded to the call in January 1900. On the 20th they had assembled for a last breakfast - the town contingent at King's College, the University contingent at Caius. Then they had each marched independently to the station before boarding the same train for a month's hard training at Bury St Edmunds. Finally it was off in the snow on the gruelling railway journey to the Southampton where in a draughty shed they waited without food or comfort for the arrival of the boat that was to carry them across the Bay of Biscay and on to South Africa

Truly they could now do their duty. Armed with rifles and a hundred rounds of cartridges and with rolled overcoats in the tremendous heat they stood their ground as the enemy swept through their positions - trainloads of them, wounded in battles further up the line,

Somewhere there was excitement but the men of Cambridgeshire were getting bored standing guard beside a railway track where the main talking point was a visit from Rudyard Kipling. In desperation they planned an ambush to get themselves noticed at the highest level - and what better than to intercept the Commander's Lady and get her to carry a polite letter to her husband!

Perhaps Lord Roberts responded. At any rate they were soon on the move on long hot marches, interspersed with long hot boring periods of inactivity and the occasional spell of excitement. Sometimes they heard the sounds of gunfire, on Whit Monday they were fired upon by shells and responded with great cheerfulness. They were less happy when ordered to carry the battalion's baggage across twelve miles of hostile country, fighting nature's rivers with only four biscuits as rations

It was September when they really saw action, getting near enough to the Boers to fire their rifles, and three days later in the chief incident of their campaign they captured a hill-top camp all by themselves and held on to it for three days without rations. Had it not been for the sheep they found and the captured wagons of flour they might have gone hungry.

Everything else was anticlimax. More long marches, more waiting, a little more excitement at the turn of the year, and then home. Home by coal truck and cattle boat, home to Bury St Edmunds a day too soon for the great celebrations that Cambridge had planned its returning heroes.

Traffic was banned, shops were shut, and flags flew as the Volunteers both town & gown, now united and in their khaki were escorted by other Volunteers in scarlet tunics before attempting the final march from the station into town. It was prove one of the most dangerous of their entire campaign

Every inch of space was occupied as walls, fences, balconies, windows & roads were packed. Near the Senate House a contingent of mounted police were drafted in to help their colleagues but without avail. In the chaotic crush people were subjected to suffocating pressure and a bandsman was seen fighting for his life, using his drumsticks as weapons.

Somehow they squeezed into Gt St Mary's for a service, thence to the Guildhall where they were admitted Honorary Freeman of the Borough and into a Corn Exchange laid out as a banqueting hall for a meal of lamb, turkey and ox followed by African Gateau and Kimberley Jelly.

Meanwhile the streets of Cambridge saw the traditional “rag, “Mob law on the common and the Market Place” read the headlines over stories of battle, charge and counter charge that resulted in more casualties amongst the participants than had been suffered by the Heroes they had gathered to honour

Stories from a year – 1902

The Coronation dinner on Parker’s Piece took tremendous organisation. There were the tables to find, the food to prepare, the volunteers to marshal and of course the very special guests to be assembled.

Some 2,500 aged poor had to be identified, located, equipped with knife, fork and spoon and transported to Parker’s Piece for their outdoor dinner. Eventually the plans were laid and the food was ready. Everybody kept fingers crossed that the weather would hold

A similar meal had been organised for the previous Coronation in 1838; at the start of the Victorian age, Now that age was dead and the Edwardian was about to begin, There was no doubt about it - the 26th June 1902 would show that modern Cambridge could match the loyalty of their forefathers. Sadly it was not to be

The news of the King’s illness - some thought it might be fatal - and the postponement of the Coronation shocked the Country. It shocked the Committee, concerned about what to do with all the food prepared for the feast that would not now take place, Hasty arrangements were made to distribute it to the elderly in their own homes before it went off in the July heat

The postponement was a short one and on August 9th the Corporation and dignitaries proceeded to King’s College chapel for the celebration service, Then came a parade of decorated vehicles intended to illustrate “Progress” , Boer war veterans processed alongside a float depicting “Africa” resplendent with pythons and crocodiles, monkeys and leopards.

Nearby came the Great Eastern Railway ambulance corps, motor cars and cycles represented “Modern times” in contrast to the old-time coach and four, whilst tradesmen showed their wares with the Co-operative Society displaying a single piece of coal weighing 7 cwt. In all the procession stretched for a mile and a half,

The programme continued with daylight fireworks, a balloon ascent and promenade concert on Parker’s Piece and culminated with a grand display of fireworks by Messrs Brock, It was an occasion to remember, but the only food was the public luncheon in the Guildhall and that cost 3/6 (18p) a head,

But on September 4th all that was put right, Tents sprouted on Parker’s Piece despite the strong winds that tugged tent poles out of the ground and threatened to cause a catastrophe. Meanwhile dozens of women were buttering bread as it fell from a machine and an engine was heating several boilers each holding 100 gallons of water. The Stetchworth Dairy had supplied 110 gallons of milk and E.A.Wadsworth came up with the ginger beer and lemonade that were to be consumed by 6,000 children rounded up from all the schools in the Borough. They munched their way through 120 stone of bread, 120 stone of cake and 4 cwt of biscuits, watched by onlookers who paid 6d for the privilege.

It was all so reminiscent of the Coronation celebrations for Queen Victoria when 15,000 had been entertained. But that was 64 years before and try as they might the Council could find only 250 residents who had been present on that occasion. But whilst the 1838 coronation had become part of the folklore of Cambridge, the 1902 is forgotten except when somebody discovers one of the official Coronation Medals depicting the King and the Corporation arms distributed to the children at the time.

Stories from a year – 1903

It was Friday 13th February 1903 when fire ripped through Laurie and McConnal’s store in Fitzroy Street, opened just 20 years before. The fire fighters rushed to the scene but had no fire engine they could bring – just six hose reel carts stationed at various parts of the town.

With no pumping equipment they relied entirely on the poor mains water pressure and quite expected the whole of Fitzroy Street to be devastated. They considered wiring to London for an engine to be sent up by special train, but considered that this would have taken too long.

In the event the street was saved, though the shop was just a mass of blackened ruins. But Mr McConnal was not one to accept defeat. He moved some of the salvaged stock to the garden of the house in which he was lodging, opened a temporary shop in Fair Street, accepted an insurance settlement of £22,650 and set to work constructing a magnificent new building.

One of the other shops in that street was the Co-operative, formed by a committee which had included three shoemakers, a carpenter, odd-job man and some mechanics. They had set up there in 1871 after two years in City Road, taking care to watch every penny – even chopping up the packing cases in which goods were received and selling them as firewood. By hard work they prospered and opened branches in Mill Road and Victoria Road, a bakery in James Street and in 1900 a new store in Burleigh Street.

The advent of the motor bus enhanced Cambridge as a shopping centre which attracted multiple shops and up-to-date proprietors such as Sainsbury, Woolworth and Boots. But whilst these might attract new shoppers to the centre, the old population which had originally supported the small-scale shops in the Fitzroy Street area was drifting away with slum clearance, for by 1952 it was found that 91% of the properties in the East Road area were worn out – over 100 years old and poorly constructed. Laurie's however continued to expand and modernise.

The 1950 Holford Report indicated that the Fitzroy Street area would be a “valuable relief for shopping pressure on the historic centre. But it also proposed a shopping development in the Lion Yard area and released a string of plans and counter-plans. Whilst the City favoured a pedestrianised shipping area, the University wanted more cultural amenities such as a library and art gallery with a regional shopping development based in the Fitzroy Street area – which the City agreed would be a good idea, but in addition to Lion Yard rather than instead of it

Plan followed plan and as the arguments rumbled on so the area deteriorated; a disused pub became a shelter for alcoholics, small shops with low rents and short leases were taken over by small businesses and their new owners added to the debate. Laurie and McConnal continued to emphasise their faith in the area in 1965 by modernising their extensive frontage and in 1970 the Co-op increased its Burleigh Street floor area by 50%

But as parking restrictions were introduced the Co-op pioneered a new form of shopping when in 1970 it established a discount warehouse for people wishing to purchase in bulk – the Beehive – which it opened to the public, winning a planning appeal to allow it to continue. At an inquiry into their second warehouse development they stated “Fitzroy Burleigh is no nearer solution than it was in 1952”.

Laurie and McConnal could not wait. In 1977 they announced their closure blaming planning indecision. Next year Grosvenor Estates entered into partnership with the City Council to develop the Grafton Centre.

Stories from a year – 1904

12.12.1989

As Christmas 1904 approached older folks' thoughts turned to some of the good old customs the modern generation would never know, when Christmas was merry and for a fortnight before and a fortnight after the event there was a constant round of junketing and sleep was very little thought of.

They recalled "Show Night" when all Cambridge and his wife used to turn into the streets and every shopkeeper did his best to make a display of his wares and catch the public eye by some form of novel window dressing. The chief objects of attention were the butcher's and poulterer's where the carcasses of prize beasts and poultry were exhibited in prestigious quantities whilst the proprietors dispensed hospitality to their customers in their private offices or parlours.

But it all got out of hand and in their endeavours to beat one another the butcher's killed more meat than they could get rid of in the ordinary way and losses followed. And then 'sentimentality' came on the scene – people thought it was barbarous and unworthy of nineteenth-century civilisation. The custom died and with it went the art of the butchers' 'windowdresser' of which the modern generation knew nothing. 'Show Night' provided a considerable fillip to trade and provided an opportunity for a great deal of harmless enjoyment and useful social intercourse. There were plans in 1904 to revive it.

The excess meat might anyway be used up in another custom – 'Beef Eating' – a free meal offered by the owner of the hotel or inn to his regular customers who dined well on cold beef and pickles, but paid for their own drinks.

Draws and raffles were also popular. Draw tickets were a shilling each and prizes of suckling pigs, gigantic turkeys, bottles and bottles of spirits were offered by publicans whose takings rose to compensate them for any expense involved. Raffles were organised by shops where people rolled dice for Christmas trees, stands of wool flowers, musical boxes or cases of stuffed birds. Although illegal the police turned a blind eye.

They also turned a deaf ear to the Christmas waits – a band of musicians who patrolled the streets, and to the children carol singers who 'howl Christmas carols and hymns, or their own perverted version on our doorstep and cadge for money – the practice is most objectionable', thought one correspondent.

Another custom which was still present in 1904 were the 'Share-our club' nights. Often these clubs were organised by public houses and working men were encouraged to pay a small sum weekly – perhaps sixpence or one shilling. These were sometimes subject to criticism with claims that for every sixpence a man invested in the club he would spend the same amount in the pub. For his investment a man got eight shillings a week sick benefit if he fell ill during the year with the residue of the funds shared out amongst members at Christmas.

In 1903 a wife sued one club you had refused her husband payment since he was not being given medicine by the doctors and so could not be 'on the club'. When told he was beyond medical care and dying they brought forward their 'share-out' night by three weeks, distributing the funds the day before the man died. There was nothing left to pay the funeral expenses and the widow's plight evoked much sympathy in the days leading up to Christmas

Stories from a year 1905

Sultan of Zanzibar

In March 1905 the Mayor, Alderman Campkin had worked hard on his civic duties all morning - a morning when Cambridge was full of hustle and bustle over the Greek controversy - in which the Prime Minister had become personally involved - voting to make Greek no longer compulsory within the University.

Then at two in the afternoon came the telegram - the Sultan of Zanzibar (in London for the coronation) would arrive at the station in 2 hours time and would appreciate an escort around the ancient town and its colleges. What was he to do: the reputation of Cambridge hospitality was at stake for a visit of royalty "even of more or less obscure regions" is a matter of some moment. The chief constable was an authority on the orient but was out of town, the University involved in its own turmoil; it was up to him. He despatched a carriage to meet the visitors - not the official Mayor's coach but the one from the Lion Hotel with one of the hotel waiters as escort.

The Royal party in turbans and flowing white robes descended in majesty from the train but of the Sultan himself there was no sign - "he had been detained in London for an audience with the King". His entourage was escorted to the Mayoral parlour but the party preferred to visit the Bazaar - in progress in the Guildhall - whose worthy stallholders (including one who had spent some time in Zanzibar) were delighted at such wealthy visitors- but disappointed when they spend not a halfpenny.

Then came the tour - to Kings to Caius and Trinity where as the Porters bowed low the Prince fell to his knees articulating his praise for its architecture in a language that none (including the interpreter) understood. This was the only word he spoke - except when one of the party stumbled and stubbed his toe - then it became apparent that *some* words were the same in English and Zanzibarian

After three quarters of an hour it was time to depart and with many salaams they set off for the station. Crowds gathered to watch their departure learned something of the mysterious ways of the Orient when the Royal party suddenly dashed to a couple of hansom cabs, and disappeared at speed towards Hills Road.

Next evening a representative from the Daily Mail travelled to Cambridge with "exclusive" news - it had all been a marvellous undergraduate hoax by members of Trinity College.

It all came as no surprise to the Editor of the Cambridge Daily News who had written only two weeks previously about an incident in 1873 when not only the Mayor but the University officials and Volunteer band had paraded to the Station to welcome an non-arriving" Shah of Persia" - an article which had obviously caught the eye of "The Sultan" at Trinity college. And the Mayor who obviously read the paper carefully had been right in his caution.

Stories from a year: 1905 [CAMBRIDGE VERSION]

In April 1905 Cambridge Railway station became the centre of attraction for at last the lumbering, slow horse-trams would be challenged by new technology - motor buses were here; not just one bus company but two, travelling the same route, competing for the same passenger

People flocked to stare at the two new rival buses, one painted Light Blue- the Cambridge colours, the other Dark Blue - that of Oxford! On the first day 2,000 brave souls climbed on board to make the journey into the centre. An undergraduate recorded his impressions in a poem published in May 1905

Oh, who will not go for a roar and a blow to the station and back to the Square
On one of the two apparitions in blue that the Vac has evolved for us here?
Oh, who would not rush in the Saturday crush for joy of a ride on the top.
Or quiver with pride - and the engine - inside, at the snort and the start and the stop

The "apparitions" were for some an unwelcome addition to the traffic congestion - for already in 1905 probably no other town had as many cars and motorcycles as Cambridge in term time. People soon became worried at the speed and the size of the monsters in the narrow central streets

"Amazes the eyes the Gargantuan size, amazes the hooter the sense,
As swoops on its way in despotic array the Triton of traffic immense
In sooth but a few will remain in the Cury at hearing the omnibus roar
There cannot be space in that limited place for the monster and anything more"

One of the new buses was an open-top, double decker, and from it passengers could see things previously hidden

Oh, bring up your "brown" for a tour of the town, from nine in the morning till ten.
This way for a new and sensational view of Christ's and Emmanuel men!
The rooms where they keep, how they look as they sleep, the muffins for tea that they buy.
The Bridge that they play and the rent that they pay, you can see all the lot from on high!

Environmentalists became concerned about the impact of this modern technology. The buses filled the streets with black exhaust smoke, and the snort of the engine was everywhere

But a Stygian gloom will assuredly loom on the brow of the lover of peace,
That another new noise should detract from the joys that for ever and ever decrease;
And loud is the wail of the bike and the trailer and trap as they scatter afar
To left and right in discomfited flight at the voice of the God in the Car

Within 6 months the double decker was banned. The single-decker lasted a bit longer before it too was forced off the road - and the slow, safe and solid trams reigned supreme once more. Their triumph was short-lived. In 1907 came another Company - the Ortona - whose direct descendents still ply the Cambridge streets

They have been joined most recently by a new generation of open-topped buses which have prompted exactly the same reactions now as in 1905!

Stories from a year: 1905 [COUNTY VARIANT]

In April 1905 Cambridge Railway station became the centre of attraction for country and townsfolk alike for the lumbering, slow horse-trams were to be challenged by new technology - motor buses had arrived.

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The Bridge that they play and the rent that they pay, you can see all the lot from on high!

Environmentalists became concerned about the impact of this modern technology. The buses filled the streets with black exhaust smoke, and the snort of the engine was everywhere. Their concerns were shared by others and within 6 months the double decker was banned. The single-decker lasted a bit longer before it too was forced off the road - and the slow, safe and solid trams reigned supreme once more.

Their triumph was short-lived. In 1907 came another Company - the Ortona whose direct descendents still ply the Cambridge streets. Soon they trundled the roads outside the town. Sawston and Cottenham routes were established by 1910. A service to Royston came in 1914 and although the war brought a halt to further expansion the postwar days saw routes to Ely, Linton, Haverhill and Willingham.

During the 1920s other companies were formed

In 1919 the newly established "Whippet" buses from Graveley started a service between Cambridge and St Ives

In 1922 the Burwell and District Motor Services started to serve the east of the county

Cambridge Blue based at Arrington started services to Bedford and Biggleswade

Premier Travel, a partnership of undergraduates, started in 1935 with a route to Royston

and although the type of buses have varied - some early pioneers even used coal-lorries which they "converted" to buses on Saturday by adding a row of seats - buses have been part of the local scene ever since. Indeed such is the congestion in central Cambridge nowadays that there are plans to force people to leave their cars on the outskirts and take instead an "apparition in blue" (now called a mini-shuttle)

Stories from a year – 1906 by Mike Petty

In November 1906 councillors held a special meeting on a Saturday morning to pass a special proposition: "To place on record the sincere regret felt by the Committee on hearing the news of the death of Mr. Pink, Librarian for more than 51 years. Their memorial went on to single out his constant care for the interests of the library and the single-minded devotion to duty of this the oldest official of the Corporation.

The young John Pink had been selected as Cambridge's first librarian in 1855: he had been one of thirteen applicants and the 22 year old got the job in preference to a retired stage coach driver, Thomas Cross.

His early days were spent in planning for the opening of the new library in a rented room in the Friends Meeting House in Jesus Lane. The great day dawned on the 28th June 1855 and at first people flocked to the library to consult the books in the room provided but it soon became clear that more was needed. It took three years of debate and planning before a

Lending department was established. Readers also wanted newspapers but the Committee were reluctant.

Eventually Pink won them over – he could take them provided they were free. The proprietors of the Cambridge Chronicle and Cambridge Independent Press duly obliged and others agreed to let the library have copies of ‘the times’ and ‘the Daily news’ that were only one day old.

Addition

Pink went on developing – he established the basis of the present “Cambridgeshire Collection” and a library for children. As the service grew he supervised its move into the Guildhall and saw the opening of a domed reading room in 1884.

But John also found great public pressure demanding a branch library in the expanding Barnwell area. A site was offered, the “low roofed tile shed made as comfortable as possible” and in 1875 it opened. Pink was allowed a new member of staff to run it but it was soon apparent that the new librarian was as fond of the public house as the public library and was dismissed for intoxication.

By now it was obvious that the building was in the wrong place and it was time to find a new site. In 1897 after considerable problems the new Mill Road library opened and was heavily used “by many of the poorest and some of the roughest classes”. But with the new library the old Barnwell branch could be closed – or so he thought. The public outcry was amazing: a petition was circulated calling for it to be kept open but neither the Library Committee nor the whole Borough Council was impressed and the library closed in June 1897.

It was not the end however, for in September a public meeting was held calling for its reopening. Local newspaper letters pages were inundated and Pink was drawn into the debate angering the logic of his case. It was a debate he was to lose for eventually the matter came before full Council once more and they gave in to the public pressure, reopening the old building as an evening reading room.

Thus John Pink learned that it was easier to open libraries than close them – a fitting testimony to the public appreciation in which his work was held then, as now.

Stories from a year – 1907 by Mike Petty

Compiled 11.9.1989

It was, said Gwen Raverat a kind of water-borne cart or floating wheel- barrow". She was referring to the garden punt that the children used for playing pirates and other water games. Engravings show Undergraduates in similar craft obstructing the commercial trade on the Backs in 1792.

Perhaps St Johns college students might have had a better result had they chosen to use one when they stole one of the balls from Clare College Bridge about 1897. Instead they used canoe and sadly the weight of the stolen item was such that their craft capsized

The garden punts bore little resemblance to the elegant slim tourist punts of today. These arrived in force in 1907 and proved tremendously popular; the previous year there had been hardly a punt available and before that, said "Table Talk "such a thing was not known in Cambridge. Yet this summer every boatyard possesses a flotilla

They were readily adopted by a number of punt hirers including Dolby, Strange, Bullen, Scudamore, Reynolds and Banham. The latter, an eminent boat builder modified the original

design, making them shorter and more easy to handle in the crowded Cam, They were redesigned again in 1967 by Scudamore as the "Camford", Other modifications have followed though some ideas, such as the fibre glass punts introduced in 1961 proved unsuccessful.

Whilst Chauffeurs can now be hired to overcome some of the problems of punting on the Backs the more hardy visitors making the voyage to Grantchester can sometimes wish for protection from childish misbehaviour. Although river patrols have been instigated nobody has as yet suggested fitting shotguns to the punts. Yet this was precisely what the old fenmen did.

Their punts were sixteen to twenty-two feet long and used for wildfowling. From the front projected a massive punt gun. As he neared the flock the stalker would lay flat on the bottom of the punt, his legs stretched out on either side to steady it and a small stalking stick in each hand as he manoeuvred into position. The explosion from the mighty muzzle loading gun could leave dozens of wildfowl dead or dying. One gunner recorded that a single shot killed 20 widgeon in January 1947.

Three months later at Haddenham other fenmen were punting into their own homes, heads bumping against ceilings as they sought to salvage something from homes flooded by the bursting of a river bank. The landscape might not resemble the beauty of the Backs but never was "a waterborne cart or floating wheel-barrow more appreciated.

Stories from a year 1908

It was old-fashioned Christmas weather snow, snow and more snow. The only problem was that it came at Easter,

In 1908 Easter fell at the end of April and people laid their plans, remembering the enjoyment of the previous year when temperatures of 70 degrees in the shade had tempted hundreds of railway excursionists to the beaches of Hunstanton. People at Ely claimed that the old legend had come true and that 'The Sun had danced on Easter morning; those up early enough might have witnessed the phenomenon (due no doubt, they said, to radiation since the sun, did shine very grandly after it rose but gave way to blizzards and ended up with vivid lightning and the roar of distant thunder at nightfall,

Nevertheless many awoke on the Monday hoping against hope that English climate would revert to the previous year's pattern. The reality was very different; they found the rooftops & ground carpeted with a couple of inches of snow with more large flakes falling. The fens lay covered to a depth of four inches whilst Huntingdon measured twelve inches and pronounced it the worst snow since the famous Easter storm of 1876

Traffic was disrupted although few actually went anywhere - the railways carried just 54 to Great Yarmouth, 75 to Huntingdon races and a scattering to Bury St Edmunds or Bishops Stortford. Only a few took the longer excursions to Bedford, Oxford or Scotland. Everywhere trips to the country or down the river were abandoned and those brave enough to venture into Cambridge itself did so with the certain knowledge that some wit would be sure to wish them Merry Christmas,

Then at midday the sky cleared & the sun shone. Cambridge people were not to be fooled however & stayed in front of the fire – only to find the temperatures continuing to rise. At Ely a mini-boom of visitors climbed to the top of the Cathedral tower for a glimpse the snow-clad landscape

The impending cricket season was attracting attention, as was the young cricketer returning home from a successful trip to Australia with the M.C.C. A smoking concert was arranged and many turned up to witness the presentation of an inscribed gold watch to Jack Hobbs

Perhaps summer could not be far away after all. But in 1908 it was to be May before the thaw came & the young folk of Milton had to be lifted over large snow drifts before they could attend their village feast

April has seen snow in other years, including 1903 and 1978, in 1912 it was the month of a record drought, and in 1918 of the highest floods since 1879. But at a time when modern headlines, are of impending climatic change it is perhaps worth recalling a comment from 81 years ago. "The English climate can not and will not be regulated ... no reliance is to be placed upon it"

Stories from a year - 1909

Early in February 1909 the Committee were busy pursuing the same old problem they'd pursued before - lack of parking spaces. Since 1888 there had been a "defence fund" set up to pay fines incurred when drivers were summonsed for "loitering about the streets". But still there was no answer. There were just too many licensed cabs for the available spaces. If all the hackney carriages in Cambridge plied for hire at the same time then every rank would be full and there would still be 50 horses and vehicles wandering around the streets unable to find a place to rest. But of the 213 licensed cabs the majority were kept in livery stables and only brought out when ordered leaving just 50 vehicles in vacation and 70 in term time to ply the streets. The Committee found that most of the authorised ranks were largely unused; hardly anybody wanted a cab in Drummer Street or Victoria Road, whilst Queens Road and Grange Road were usually deserted. Of the 50 spaces at the station most stood vacant except at the beginning of term. The traveller returning to Cambridge by the last train would often find the rank deserted except for Phil Stocker, whose horse was acknowledged to be the slowest in town. His death in 1917 left only "lame Walter" Mansfield plying his trade, a character so loved by his regular customers that when his old cab failed to pass its inspection in 1912 they'd rallied round to buy him a new landau. At the turn of the century the hansom cabby had been king of the streets. With his shiny top hat cocked rakishly over one ear, a bunch of violets in his buttonhole, thick double-seamed overcoat buttoned closely around his portly form and a pair of stout driving gloves "Gentleman Joe" on his dickey was a great personality. The arrival of the motor taxis in 1908 hit them badly but many passengers confessed they would prefer to sit behind a spanking good 'gee' than the bald, uninteresting back of a chauffeur. The cabs themselves might sport rubber-tyred wheels for a smoother ride but one passenger who jumped into his seat too heavily found himself running down St Andrews Street when an old tin tray which had been placed over a large hole in the wooden floor gave way under his weight. Today's modern motor taxis are much more comfortable and reliable but none of them can boost their takings like one old cab-owner. He used an former circus horse which had been taught to rear up on his hind legs to say "thank-you" for any tip received - an act much appreciated by his customers|

Stories from a year – 1910, by Mike Petty

Cambridge has a habit of doing things in twos; in 1888 an act of parliament allowed the construction of two new bridges, in 1905 two bus companies started operating and in 1910 two groups built their own aeroplane. Both consortia included a member of the Wallis family.

One was a biplane constructed in Chesterton by four young scientific instrument makers called Knightley, Booth, Miller and Wallis. They hired a large barn in the High Street and by May their aircraft – a glider – was virtually complete, ready for display during May week. The machine was virtually all their own design, though they had taken one idea from the Wright Brothers. It was held together with 3,000 brass screws and was to be launched from Royston for trial flights. If successful an engine would be fitted.

More successful was the steel-framed Wallbro machine with its 25hp JAP engine built in St Barnabas Road by H.S. and P. B. Wallis. By July it was ready for flight trials in a field near Abington; it rose a few feet from the ground and sailed along for 3 or 4 yards before coming down nose first and somersaulting. The pilot jumped clear and was uninjured, the machine was picked up and exhibited next month at the Mammoth Show when over 6,000 paid to see it. It was destroyed shortly afterwards when its hanger collapsed but recreated in 1981 helped by the detailed technical notes that had been published in the Cambridge Daily News in 1910.

Meanwhile Huntingdon was preparing for the opening an Aviation Race Course, on Portholme Meadow, witnessing its first flight, by a Bleriot monoplane in April 1910. It was August 1911 before a man flew over Cambridge itself and October when the first plane landed when Second Lieutenant W. B. Rhodes Moorhouse became lost en route to the new Huntingdon airfield and came down on Parkers Piece with an empty fuel tank.

Public interest in flying had been heightened by reports of the activity in an Oakington farmyard where in 1909 two well-known aeronauts had been building a monoplane in a bid to win the prize of £1,000 offered by the Daily Mail for the first circular mile flight by an all-British aeroplane. Its constructors were A. M. Grose, the first person to have been granted a motor drivers licence, and N. A. Feary, a native of the village. It was powered by a specially designed engine by a Northampton company, the propeller was by Handley Page and the chassis constructed by H. V. Quinsee of East Road, Cambridge. As the day of the flight neared the partners argued over who should not be the pilot – one had a family, the other a widowed mother to support. The first trials were with the machine tethered to a stake but then it was let free, careered across a field but only became airborne when it hit a bump.

But the grand pioneer of local aviation had been E. P. Frost of West Wrattling Hall who as early as 1867 had started to invest £1,000 and ten years in the construction of a flying machine with flexible wings that would flap up and down and lift it into the air. It needed a 25 horse power engine but in those days there was only steam and the power was not available. By the time a petrol engine came along thirty years later the machine, left under trees in the park, was a total wreck.

Airplanes with flapping wings seem totally illogical today but so does the autogyro – a mini helicopter featured in one of the James Bond films. Yet that does fly and was developed by a company registered in 1975 at Chesterton Road – almost inevitably by another member of the Wallis family.

Stories from a year - 1911

"Why are there so many hard-working men on the scrap heap, living a life of degradation and misery"? These were the sentiments of an Aberdeen man, one of the first to use the newly-opened Labour Exchange in Guildhall Street in 1911. His quest for work had been unsuccessful.

Through the hardships of the 1920s and 1930s soup kitchens were opened to soften the pangs of hunger and the Town Council initiated a series of measures to find work for the

unemployed. The sports facilities on Jesus Green, and the paving stones along Queens Road are testimony to some of the job-creation schemes initiated.

Roads were constructed to serve the soon to be developed acres off Cherry Hinton Road and long-delayed schemes reassessed. One of these was the revival of a project to relieve traffic congestion in Silver Street and make better communication with Newnham that had been long mooted - indeed the need for such a route had been voiced at the opening of Victoria Bridge in 1889. There was great opposition with nine separate schemes drawn up in 1923 and "if not for the urgency of the unemployment position we should be in the same position today, only instead of nine there would have been nineteen". Such was the opinion of the Mayor in December 1926 when the Fen Causeway was formally opened. It had given employment to 90 men over a two year period.

By 1932 Cambridge was reported as responding to a Government appeal to sell gold, jewellery and trinkets to help the national financial crisis. "This is the time to spend - buy new clothes, furniture or extra food. Have your house decorated or painted. A prompt response to this appeal will lift thousands of homes from misery into happiness by Christmas". The Cambridge Master Builders took out an advertisement to emphasise the problem: "Do you realise that 1,653 able-bodied men are totally unemployed in your own town. Do you realise that of this appalling total 543 men are of the building trade"

The suicide rate rose, despair continued and the International Situation became graver. But during the War years the unemployment situation lessened due in part to 'Butlins' - the 'in' name for the Government Offices established at Brooklands Avenue which boosted Central government employment by 350%. In 1959 the Employment Exchange was moved there from Newnham and reported that there were only 340 men and 67 women unemployed in the area, compared to 1,400 in July 1938. "All-out drive to lure workers to pricey Cambridge" read the headlines in 1973 - sentiments repeated almost exactly today. Shops have difficulty attracting staff, firms move away and leaflets are distributed in Lion Yard begging for workers. The windows of the Job Centre - now once more in Guildhall Street - are full of positions, but not for the Scotsmen on the benches in Lion Yard who still experience the degradation and misery bemoaned by their compatriot 87 years ago.

Stories from a Year, 1912

28.8.1989

In a room at Trinity College plans were laid for the annihilation of thousands of British troops. Soon 130,000 enemy soldiers were landed at Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft and were heading inland. Cambridge took it all very placidly – watched the officers start off in their motor cars, and chatted to the men in the bar of the Lion Hotel. It was after all just a paper exercise with Sir John French and his cronies returning nightly to the peace of their college. It was September 1907

Within a year the troops were real and the area patrolled by cavalry. 150 passed through Cambridge and a squadron spent the night on Grantchester Meadows, another by the side the Witchford Road at Ely, yet more in Withersfield Road, Haverhill. A country policeman found eight in full uniform with hats and spurs, their horses tethered by their side, lying dead to the world, fast asleep. Meanwhile the invading Irish Hussars fought inland from Colchester. Again Cambridge did not panic – it was just a military exercise.

In 1910 the German army swarmed ashore at Kings Lynn and conquered Lincoln. The King issued a proclamation imposing military control throughout Cambridgeshire as the invaders swept south. This time Cambridge fell and a fierce battle raged from Helions Bumpstead to Kelshall, fiercest around Elmdon where British trenches were more than once captured by the Magdeburg battalions only to be hurled out again by the Coldstream Guards. By noon the

magnificent palace at Audley End was in flames and desperate fighting was taking place in the streets of Saffron Walden. The timely arrival of General Packington's force from Pottton proved decisive; despite a final cavalry charge the Germans were slaughtered, swept out of existence by a terrible cross fire. By nightfall there was no unwounded German south of Whittlesford, except as a prisoner. The Battle of Royston was hailed as a great victory in the Daily Mail of September 10th 1910.

But this too was a fictional war, recounted in a novel by William Le Queux to point out the likely impact of such a real invasion, a story that so impressed Field Marshall Lord Roberts that he added a Foreword. The book was written in 1906, next year French planned his invasion and in 1912 all the preparations were tested properly.

The area selected was that part of the country "which should invasion take place, will assuredly witness a life or death struggle between the defenders of the country and the invaders". Thus Newmarket, Royston and Linton were again the scene of great activity, of route marches and cavalry charges, airships and artillery. This time the invaders were led by Sir Douglas Haig, while Sir John French directed the manoeuvres from his base at Trinity College. There the guards on the gates were for real, with bayonets fixed, when the King came to see for himself the progress of a realistic – but phoney – war in September of 1912.

In September 1914 the troops on the commons told their own tale, but as for 1939 well only time will tell if this time the war was for real or just another exercise in September sabre-rattling

Stories from a year 1913

By May 1913 Cambridge was quite used to the call of votes for women. Generally the struggle for the Parliamentary vote was conducted by serious political lobbying and debate, but such meetings passed largely unnoticed whilst the more extreme "Suffragettes" made the news.

Cambridge's first experience of such protestors came in 1908 when in what the male reporters described as a "very exciting" incident one struggling female had to be carried out of a meeting - they would soon find out that Cambridge was not a congenial place for this sort of activity.

However 1910 saw a visit from the leading militant, Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst who was greeted with hostile demonstrations. 1911 saw women walking the streets to avoid being counted on census night and a local minister's wife being arrested during a suffragette raid on the House of Commons. In 1912 the University Men's League for Women's Suffrage was lobbying on their behalf and the Conservative Women's Franchise Association was formed but it was the militants who hit the headlines in May 1913.

Early one Saturday morning two plain clothed policemen spotted smoke coming from a newly-built houses in Storeys Way, The new motor fire engine roared off from St Andrews street, followed shortly afterwards by the firemen, some cycling, some running and some riding in a covered van. They were too late to save the roof of the first house but did manage to prevent serious damage to the second.

Detective Sergeant Marsh was set on the case. He discovered somebody had broken in through the study window, poured paraffin over sawdust and packing cases and set them on

fire. They had then moved to the adjoining premises and repeated the process. There were three clues: bloodstains from broken glass, footprints and a ladies gold watch. On Wednesday he travelled to Norwich and arrested a schoolteacher.

The suspect, an active Suffragette, admitted being in Cambridge on the evening in question and she had a fresh wound on her hand. The crucial evidence **was** the watch, a present from her uncle, a Norwich policeman. She was sentenced to 18 months hard labour but went on hunger strike and was released in October.

Meanwhile other Suffragette outrages continued to hit the headlines; they tried to set fire to the Varsity rugby pavilion. They landed by boat at St Johns College to paint the gates purple, green and white and daub "Votes for Women" on the stone work. They disrupted a garden party at Magdalene College and generally caused such mayhem that Colleges closed their gates during the Long Vacation.

Meanwhile the ladies of the Union of Suffrage Societies prepared to welcome a contingent of women taking part in a Pilgrimage to London in July 1913. Their march was heckled as it made its way past the colleges the "suffragettes" had terrorised and an attempt to address the gathering on Huntingdon Road was shouted down. But the large numbers who turned out were left in no doubt as to the success of the occasion, and all were content that they had helped to break down some of the prejudice created by their militant sisters.

Stories from a year – 1914 by Mike Petty

What a time to be a boy!

August Bank Holiday 1914 meant the Mammoth Show – not so “Mammoth” as once it had been, but still exciting. There were athletic sports, side shows, dancing and fireworks, even a balloon ascent. But that day there was something better – following the crowds down to the railway station to see the first of the Naval Reservists off to the War.

The station was crowded with boisterous farewells between relative and friend, so there were no tears, only shouting and laughter, and when the train finally drew in there was singing with most of the people joining in. The train doors were slammed shut, embraces hastily given, hands shaken and promises made to be home by Christmas; then with shouting and waving, and chanting about the boys of the bull-dog breed, the naval reservists were off. Jack Overhill watched them go and wandered home.

Soon Cambridge got quite used to seeing the khaki uniforms as the Territorials mobilised. Appeals went out for extra men to join the Royal Army Medical Corps – the first Eastern General Hospital – quartered in one of the large rooms adjoining Corn Exchange Street and soon to be based at the Leys School before moving on to Trinity College.

Some were not happy of course. Farmers were worried that the Army would take their horses, grown-ups moaned about the soaring prices – butter up 2d a pound, bacon now 1s. 4d (7p), and shelves emptying rapidly as panic buying set in.

But the Boy Scouts were being prepared. They could help the war effort in a number of ways – distribute notices, help in soup kitchens, look after the families whose men were at War, and – more excitingly – assist despatch riders, (especially in the way of puncture mending), pick up despatches dropped from aircraft – and watch out for spies!

One morning came the rumour that there were soldiers on Coe Fen, Jack Overhill dashed off to see. There stretching away to the far end of the Fen was a row of white bell tents. Parallel

with them, over the middle ditch, were horses and wagons. As there were no sentries he could wander amongst them, peering into the tents where soldiers were sitting and lying.

Somebody said there were more on Midsummer Common and off he ran. He'd never seen anything like it. Soldiers, horses, tents, wagons, limbers, guns – there was hardly room to move. The men were washing, shaving, cleaning their boots, belts and buckles, grooming, cooking.... doing all the everyday soldierly things that fascinated youngsters and their parents.

Everybody turned out to look and marvel. Local folk brought pails of water, hot meals, cups of tea, apples – anything; hawkers did the same but charged extortionate prices. Jack made friends with two of the lads, learning the words to *Its a Long Way to Tipperary* that they played on the mouth-organ and listening to their chatter long into the summer night. It was a great time to be a boy!

One morning he ran down to the Fen to find grass, trees, and sky. Soldiers, horses, tents and wagons had vanished. They had come in the night and had gone in the night.

Stories from a year - 1915

Cambridge Antiquarian Society is the most senior of the groups who have an interest in the area's past. Its meetings and its prestigious "Proceedings" comprise contributions fully researched by specialists and usually devoted to topics such as Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, Roman Burials, iron-age swords or Victorian stage coach routes.

In January 1915 Catherine Parsons was speaking on witchcraft - but this time she was not dwelling on the past but speaking of the present - the life and feelings of her Cambridgeshire village where witchcraft was very much alive.

The parishioners had told her there always were witches and there always would be - and they truly believed she was in league with the Devil and had the power to do evil. To make the contract the Devil usually appeared to the person in the shape of an animal such as a rat, mouse or toad. Once recruited the witch became possessed of imps or spirits which lived upon her body and unless given plenty of work to do became a terrible torment to their owner.

Villagers sometimes spotted one of the imps in their house - "it looked something like a mouse with very large eyes and a tail only two inches long, and as soon as it was spotted it scrambled away up the chimney to report what it had seen to the witch". The local rag and bone man chased an imp she had sent to spy on him - "but the faster I ran the faster he ran till that got to her cottage, where the witch stood, she quickly caught it up and put it in her bosom - they always carry them there, or under her armpit - she takes them to church with her".

Superstitious people ascribed various powers to the wise woman and generally went out of their way to stay in her good books. People believed they were safe provided the witch did not possess anything that belonged to them - but how could they be sure she had not picked up a piece of your broken crockery or taken a spring from the garden hedge, just enough to give her power.

Witches were extortioners and their craft remunerative; she could put a spell on your dough so the bread did not rise or on coal so it would not burn. She could influence animals, making horses stop dead in their tracks, pigs go off their feed, and cows stop giving milk or even send swarms of fleas to bite her victim.

Villagers had various remedies to protect themselves - "you go to the village shop and buy a halfpenny worth of salt without saying please or thank you for it" ... "you put a piece of steel

under your doormat - for a witch cannot cross steal, and a knife under the chair will stop with witch sitting down".

Eventually a witch got old and longed to be at rest. But, it was believed, she could not die until she found somebody to take care of her imps. "When one was dying nobody could stay in the room with her because of the sulphur which came from her nose and mouth - and she wouldn't have died except for the nurse - witch told her not to open a certain hutch she kept in the room, but the old nurse would not listen - she looked in and there was a red underskirt - the imps was wrapped up in it and escaped!" Sometimes the witch tried to burn the imps by putting them in a hot oven, "but they screamed so loud they had to be taken out and were returned to the witch ... eventually they were put in the coffin and buried with her". On another occasion "it was as much as two strong men with pitchforks could do to keep the imps from bursting the oven door open and the men were terrified by the strength of the imps who screamed and cried like a lot of little children".

The folklore of Cambridgeshire is full of tales of witchcraft, modern newspapers carry contemporary stories, but few can match the details given by a respected historian to an audience of Cambridge academics some 74 years ago.

Storied from a year – 1916 by Mike Petty

"We have bombed the town of Cambridge" all its factories are useless, lying now in smoking ruins". Thus came the news from Berlin.

It was expected. The Red Cross nurses from Wordsworth Grove had been alerted, stretcher bearers called for. Meanwhile the other patients, convalescing from operations had been tucked up safely in their beds whilst bandages and scissors, lint and slings and dressings were prepared for use.

Outside the night was peaceful – just the sound of running water from the weir and the river, or a distant hoot from a motor horn. The scattered stretcher-bearers in their dark and cheerless posts were getting cold and hungry, whilst in the Hospitals nurses piled up fires and warmed up coffee. The night dragged by and dawn was approaching when the field Marshall dismissed them all and they turned home in the early hours of April 1st, thinking it had been a hoax. Yet the later German communiqué implied that Cambridge might have been a target after all.

The first-hand account of the raid that wasn't was recorded in the Wordsworth Grove "Monthly Magazine", the first issue of which was published in January 1916. The articles, poems and jokes capture something of the atmosphere of the Convalescent homes which tended the wounded and maimed after their surgery at the first Eastern General Hospital in Burrell's Walk. Under the administration of Commandant Alex Wood its staff catered for 30 patients at a time, organising dances or theatre visits, river trips and even band concerts, using the talents staff and patients alike. It was just one of many such Hospitals opened during 1915 in anticipation of the casualties that were to be expected. Others were based in "Huntley", Herschel Road and at 2, 3, and 4 Cintra Terrace, Hills Road, which had originally treated wounded Belgian soldiers. The three houses were old-fashioned and inconvenient so they had transferred to St Chad's in Grange Road, a large house with sunny room and delightful garden.

In the surrounding area various large houses such as "The Firs" at Histon, "Mount Blow", Shelford, "Old House" Swavesey and the "Park House" Balsham were made available by their owners. They were supplemented by Parish, village or church halls in Fulbourn, Willingham, Shepreth, Whittlesford, and Cottenham, whilst for a time the Union workhouse at Linton was pressed into use. Between them they treated over 21,000 patients until

disbanded in May 1919 whilst 80,000 were transported from the station to the various hospitals without mishap.

Transport of another nature is featured in the first magazine with a poem entitled “The wreck of the Sunbeam” recalling the adventures of a soldier who borrowed Sister’s bicycle to explore the town. His adventure ended with the machine wedged beneath the wheels of a car and no amount of repair could salvage anything from the wreckage. In fear and trembling he approached its owner.

“They rushed downstairs to view the wreck
A sorry sight to see!
She turned away with curses low,
Then bathed the hero’s knee!”

In August 1916 the King saw for himself some of the care bestowed locally on wounded soldiers and, 5 months later, the Zeppelins did arrive over Cambridgeshire and bombs were dropped. It would appear that little damage was done but without copies of the Wordsworth Grove magazine one cannot be sure since details were censored in the official press – and who would believe the Germans following their April claims!

Stories from a year – 1917 by Mike Petty

By 1917 the Great War had dragged on and the costs had rocketed. In January they were estimated at £5.7 million a day. But the real cost of the war was not money but men – patriotic appeals from volunteers were now being supplemented with compulsion. Throughout the country local tribunals were established who had to decide who could be allowed to stay at home for essential local duties - a terrible responsibility for its members – one of whom resigned when his own son was refused exemption. Others took it more stoically.

John Henry Sadler was called before the tribunal – he was 32, married a thatcher spent some time vermin killing and chimney sweeping. The exchange is reported verbatim.

“What were you doing yesterday?”

“Mole catching sir because they destruct the crops, I skinned 40 moles last night after I had my tea” (laughter).

“Moles you had by you”

“No, they were all fresh ones.” Sadler also stated that he had a brother who was a Prisoner of War.

“That is why you should go and fight the Germans – I am afraid you will have to join up”.

“I am sorry to hear it”

Often farmers appeared on behalf of their men. Charles Wright appeared for George Dimock, a 39 year old married man with 6 children, and for Arthur Nightingale, a horsekeeper. Wright stated that since they had taken two of his men some 30 acres had gone out of cultivation – what should have been wheat was nothing but thistles and grass. He was worse off than any other farmer for labour since he employed more single men than others. He lost his case. Albert Wright, aged 19, applied for himself. He was a smallholder and carter who farmed 9½ acres on his own as well as working for other smallholders. He had lost his left eye when working as a blacksmith’s assistant and been advised to take up agricultural work. He was one of the hardest working lads in the village and was granted conditional exemption.

Although a formula was produced allowing so many men per head of cattle, the impact on food production was severe, and newly formed agricultural labourers union protested about

the need for Sunday working – when munitions workers were given the day off – and wages – what was the use of giving labourers 25/- per week when inflation meant it was only worth 14/6. The proposals that young girls might be trained for milking and feeding cows – “turned from domestic employment on to a farm to work among boys and men without any supervision” met with opposition from some quarters. Many of those granted exemption were required to join the Defence Force where they were trained to guard the home front and be ready to prevent invasion. Should the Germans land on the East Coast it would be essential that men and munitions be deployed as quickly as possible, yet road links were poor. Thus in 1917 soldiers were employed to construct a new road between Stretham and Wicken where locals anticipated the benefits that would accrue to their village whose large greens would be certain to prove irresistible as camping ground for passing cavalry. The road was duly completed – but scarcely used since nobody could decide who should pay for the bridges across the Old West and Cam rivers – and therefore not built.

Strict controls were brought in over foodstuff and an eight year old boy sent to prison for 14 days and whipped for stealing bread; people were urged not to shoot pigeons – they might be carrying important messages.

But the real carriers of important messages were the postmen. After every new assault his progress down the village street would be watched carefully. Time after time he would stop and deliver the letter that people dreaded receiving – that a son or husband was wounded, dead, or – worse – just “missing”.

Stories from a year 1918

It was Christmas in Cambridge and people who had been fighting for the future were spending as if there was no tomorrow. Nobody could begrudge them having a bit of a fling but caution was being urged – money would not be coming in so easily very shortly; the emergency munitions works in Cambridge were all shutting down; several factories had given notice that they would have to reduce staff and when demobilisation came it would mark the end of the separation allowances which had been providing regular income into many homes. It all went unheeded – never had there been more people in Cambridge than on the Saturday afternoon before Christmas.

The principal streets were absolutely crowded, the shops congested. From a trading point of view it was the best for many years and several shops were completely cleared out.

But where were the raisins for the Christmas pudding, the abundant shiploads of apples, the light foreign wines that were to turn thoughts from the unobtainable whisky. These and many little comforts and luxuries which had been alluring held out to the British housekeeper had simply failed to materialise proving once more that the profiteer was too strong for the controller.

For this was 1918; the armistice had been signed, the rejoicings on Market Hill had taken place only a week or so before, and already there was news of returning husbands and sweethearts. Cambridge itself was full of soldiers and sailors home on leave. Meanwhile all but 600 of the wounded from the First Eastern General Hospital across the Backs had been sent home on 12 day passes. The remainder were fully entertained in the wards made as bright and attractive as possible with decorations much in evidence.

Addenbrooke's Hospital was also transformed; Chinese lanterns, evergreens and chrysanthemums decorated every ward and "festivities of extraordinary gaiety" planned. The presence of soldier patients shattered in nerve and body made the civilian patients, both male and female, who were lying ill in bed feel much more thoroughly that there was much to be

thankful for and as they thought of the men in blue and what they had gone through their own ailments became light in comparison. Nature too joined in the celebrations with an aurora borealis on Christmas night which lasted for some hours and attracted considerable attention.

The northern sky glowed with a ghostly radiance and at times great shafts of pearly light lit the night sky like the rays of a searchlight, reminding some of their experiences on the Western Front.

All this was seen and reported by vigilant newspapermen. Nobody took much notice however when a returned army chaplain, Eric Milner White, started a new sort of carol service at King's College. He adapted the idea that had been begun at Truro Cathedral in 1880 with nine carols and nine lessons read by various officers of the church beginning with a chorister and ending with a bishop. It would, he said, symbolise the link between Kings and Eton, the goodwill between University and Town and peace within the whole Church at Christmas time.

Ten years later the BBC broadcast it for the first time; they continued even during the Second War when the Chapel glass was removed for safe keeping, there was no heating and for security reasons the name of the Chapel had to be kept secret. This year the Saturday afternoon tills will ring a little less frantically as millions throughout the world stop their shopping to celebrate with the congregation in a Cambridge chapel a Christmas tradition with its roots in wartime.

Stories from a year – 1919, by Mike Petty 24th May 1990

In April 1919 Homerton College became the venue for the first Rally of the Cambridgeshire Girl Guides. By then there were 31 Troops throughout the county with Guides established in Linton, Harston and Bottisham as well as Cambridge. Here the first group had been established in 1911 to cater for the aspiration of a few girls who had been inspired to become Girl Scouts by seeing the activities of their Brothers.

The Boy Scout movement in Cambridge had started at a meeting in the YMCA addressed by General Baden-Powell on 21st February 1908. It was followed by a public meeting at the Perse school the next month following which "monkey patrols" of boys were formed, playing at scouting without being under any proper control. These were soon formed into Troops in Cambridge, Cherry Hinton, Chesterton and at the Higher Grade and Perse schools. In May 1910 200 scouts were inspected in the grounds of the Perse school and -a meeting inaugurated the Cambridge Boy Scout Association. Later 125 members of the local troops made their way to Windsor park for a Coronation Rally where they were inspected by the new King, George V. The excitement of meeting the King could surely only be equated with that of seeing the hero of the defence of Mafeking - Robert Baden-Powell himself.

Yet in 1911 he was at Cambridge. It was a bitterly cold day and the wind howled across Parkers Piece where 400 scouts assembled before marching off - with cyclists and mounted scouts in the rear - to the University O.T.C. ground where the great man inspected them. At the sound of a bugle call the apparently empty field became filled with scouts, saluting -their Chief with their staves, Zulu fashion, and shouting their patrol calls. Further rallies followed in 1912 and 1913*, but then came war.

In July 1914 a mixed group of scouts left Cambridge for camp at Lt Downham. They camped on a splendid site on a hill overlooking the rich Fenland. They explored the great Cathedral, gave a display at the village fete, were inspected by the Principal of the Ely Theological College, and listened to the rumours of War. As soon as it was declared they started keeping a night watch, sent messages in Morse code to Littleport, 4 miles away, and gave a concert for

the local troops. Then came the telegram from General Baden-Powell, ordering them back home.

Next day they struck camp and marched to Ely station, arriving just behind the Ely territorials then leaving for Ipswich. Anxious women, standing at cottage doors were heard to ask: "What are they going to send those little chaps to the front too?" Whilst they did not leave for France they did play their part, guarding bridges during the passage of troop trains and guarding the water tower and pumping station at Isleham - though what, some asked, could they do against German spies trying to blow them up.

In June 1915 the Perse troop joined the Volunteer Training Corps in a military field exercise between Cherry Hinton and Gt Shelford, attempting to penetrate a defensive cordon thrown around Cambridge. Next year "Wolf cub" packs were formed and in 1922 they succeeded in ambushing the Chief Scout himself at Queens' college in June 1922. B-P was en route to present Kings Badges to a number of senior scouts when a large group of cub scouts leapt over the wall of Cloister Court to surround him and reaffirm their pledge "Achela we will do our best".

In November 1917 the Cambridge executive committee passed a resolution allowing girls to attend social evenings - but only if chaperoned by their mothers. That has now changed but both Guides and Scouts continue to offer the youth of the County a challenging and rewarding alternative to television and boredom. |

* this 1913 rally was held in the grounds of Downing College in May

Stories from a year - 1920

When Lazarus Marsh retired in March 1920 many were pleased to see him go.

His career had started in 1875 and since then he had poked and pried into the seamy side of Cambridge life ending up with a reputation of one of the town's top crime-busters. For Lazarus was a 'tec - a Detective Sergeant in the police force.

His reminiscences published in the Cambridge Chronicle omitted much of the more serious crime that had occupied the police during the period of his employment. He did refer to the "Jack the Ripper" threats that had been prominent in 1888 but drew a veil over the controversy that surrounded the University's imprisonment of young ladies they suspected of "walking" with undergraduates, powers that were transferred to the police in 1894. Perhaps he smiled when he remembered the appointment of the first women- constables in 1918 in response to complaints that girls were "ogling" soldiers.

Marsh would have known the new Police Station erected on the site of the University's "Spinning House" in 1901, and would have followed with interest the council debate in 1910 on whether to give police a day off each week - no came the reply, it would cost 23/7 (£1.18) a week more and could not be afforded.

Like others of his profession he would be accused of heartless and brutal violence every November 5th - "inhuman monsters who dash hither and thither" - in the attempt to restore peace on a night shattered by fires and explosions.

He may have shared the private agony of the policeman who recognised the watch dropped amongst the ashes of a Storeys Way house burnt by Suffragettes as being the one he had given his niece - a clue that led to her imprisonment and subsequent hunger strike.

As a young constable he might have participated in the security escort for a suspected Saffron Walden murderer transferred each morning from the County Gaol to the station en route to his trial in 1903 or, ten years later, helped with the case of the Spiritualist who shot his two children and then committed suicide "so that the family could be reunited with his dead wife".

His memoirs recalled his first case - burglars who cut the back from a safe in Huntingdon Road to steal the silver it contained, but who took too long over it and missed their escape train. Marsh nabbed them on the platform.

Often he travelled by train himself, warning undergraduates about the activities of card-sharps, two of whom he once caught just outside the police station in St Andrews Street and bundled them in through the door with the minimum of inconvenience.

Other crimes needed much more time. Hours of observation caught bank swindlers living in Chesterton and the hardened London villains who found Cambridge a happy hunting ground for bicycles could never rest easy once they knew that Marsh was on their trail.

Lazarus won many commendations from magistrates and villains alike during his 45 years service, he retired to his gardening. "Offending weeds", said the paper, "would receive the same close attention that he has given for years to the worthless growth which has endeavoured to feed itself on society".

Stories from a year - 1921

As the bugler played the last post some of the village lads demonstrated their Freedom of Speech in noisy conversation; others exercised their Freedom of Action by riding their Japanese motorcycles noisily past the war memorial.

"We will remember them ..." but the lads have never known that 118 sons like themselves had left their village for France in the early years of the Great War.

Week after week the local paper was full of familiar faces that would never be seen again; by September 1916 12 had been killed - a number that was to treble. Two who had been home on leave that June were dead by then, a sister was told in November that both her brothers had been injured - one was lying wounded in a Gloucester Convalescent Home, no-body knew where the other lay - his body was never found.

The news filtered back. Private Joe had lost his left eye, Corporal Frank was killed during an assault when a bullet hit him in the heart. Heber wrote home "I am again out in the trenches ... just as we were going after the Germans a shell exploded in front of me and knocked me back in the trench and buried me ... mates with shovels got me out". His name appears on the memorial, his luck did not last.

Then in July 1919 a public meeting was called to consider a suitable way to commemorate the 38 men killed in action. Various forms of memorial were considered; the Territorial Association was unable to supply a Field Gun but could offer two German machine guns - they were declined. Instead the village collected £170 and erected an obelisk of grey Cornish granite.

On Armistice Sunday 1921 it was unveiled in the cemetery by the Member of Parliament in the presence of the whole village together with a contingent of the local British Legion and three clergy - Free Church, Baptist and Methodist ministers, none of them village men. There was no representative from the Church of England, nor was the Rector present despite the fact that one of the names inscribed on the memorial was that of his son.

In July 1922 another war memorial was unveiled, just eight months after the first. The MP was there again, the speeches of sadness yet pride were again heard. The same buglers who had sounded the Last Post at the Cemetery repeated their mournful call, this time in the Churchyard.

Throughout the county similar battles were being fought, squabbles over where memorials should be placed, their design and the names of those who should be commemorated divided communities and were hotly debated by parson and people.

Now in 1988 the deep feelings which split the village in 1921 are forgotten at the United Service. A solitary poppy decorates the Cemetery memorial whilst in the Churchyard people assemble to pay homage to the names from two Wars inscribed in stone but now fading away. And as those who have grown old remember those who did not the trumpet note drowns the carefree banter of a Sunday afternoon in one Cambridgeshire village.

Stories from a year 1922 by Mike Petty

In January 1922 the death was announced of Mrs A. A. Moyes, the proprietress of the Lion Hotel in Petty Cury. Her demise would be mourned far and near for, it was said, there is hardly a civilised country in which there cannot be found many people who had at some time or other received kindnesses from this skilful and courageous lady. To generations of undergraduates she was a good friend, indulgent to the extravagances of youth but firm and capable in preventing lapses into hooliganism. Townsmen remembered the interest she took in their various enterprises and agriculturalists her ready sympathy in all their undertakings.

But those who would cherish her memory most were the Belgian refugees of 1915 to whom she showed the care and devotion of a mother.

She had first come to prominence as landlady at the Bath Hotel which on her marriage came under the joint management of herself & her husband, an enterprising caterer. Their menus for public dinners set the fashion for Cambridge and the Bath market dinner was the talk of the county. Various societies made the hotel their base, including the Cambridge Cycling Club whose smoking concerts were copied by almost every other club and institution. The amateur and cottage garden societies which were just beginning to flourish also found it a suitable place to meet – all testimony Mrs Moyes ability to please. As the success grew so it became apparent that more space was necessary; by now a widow she was contemplating extensions when in 1894 she was offered the opportunity of taking over the Lion, following the death of the proprietor, her late husband's father

With her departure from the Bath a chapter in the social history of the town closed. Now she started to make the Lion an institution. Under her rule it grew famous, particularly as a Commercial Hotel and the headquarters of visiting sportsmen and athletic teams. Each visitor was made to feel that he or she was the only person the hostess delighted to honour - so they came back time and again. The old Inn Yard was covered with a glass roof and the rooms became shops for travelling salesmen who laid out samples in the yard were buyers from the big stores come to inspect the goods that were despatched by rail. The practice died out with the increased use of the motor car. These vehicles were having a profound impact on Cambridge life as the Royal Show held here in 1922 demonstrated. Many people came in their cars and went home in their cars, rather than stay the night in the town

Neither such developments, licensing difficulties or physical ill health could quench Mrs Moyes' enterprise or check her enthusiasm. She was urged by friends to retire and take a well-earned rest but instead she continued and died "in harness". Her daughters continued the business.

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While motor cars might reduce the visitors to the Lion Hotel it was realised that somewhere would be needed to station the vehicles. At the rear of the hotel a number of wooden outbuildings - stables, smithy, bottle store and laundry - stood around a former bowl green now no longer needed for its original purpose. These buildings were gradually demolished to provide car parking space. By 1950 over 80,000 motorists were using the Lion Hotel yard and the Council were planning a ramped car park - or should it be an underground car park - the inevitable debates continued

In 1961 in the single largest property transaction the city had seen, the Hotel was purchased by a property company. Two years later the hotel closed, though the bars remained, and the demolition men moved in in 1968. They briefly reopened the old courtyard for the development that perpetuates the name of the hotel that the Moyes family made famous

Stories from a year - 1923

The Mayor was adamant - he would not do it, and nor would the Mayoress for that matter. Civic duty was one thing, this something completely different. So he turned to his fellow Councillors on the Commons Committee - this was their chance to make a piece of Cambridge history - not one of them dared. So in desperation he had turned to his friend, Councillor Symonds. But not even he would spring forward to salvage Cambridge pride. The 1,500 people assembled for the occasion - Aldermen, Borough Surveyor, Chief Constable and County Coroner amongst them - would witness the opening of Jesus Green swimming pool without the traditional spectacle of seeing the biggest big wig jump in.

But why should they choose this, of all sites. Speaking through his megaphone he rehearsed the benefits that had been debated so fiercely - it was in the centre of a large number of schools and the children would now use it rather than jumping into the river which, with its sloping bed, mud and weeds, was dangerous.

The new baths were 300 ft long and 40 ft wide - and ideal for water polo ... By putting them near Jesus Lock they were able to get a natural flow of water from the river, which would constantly keep the water pure and clean without the expense of pumping. Not all were convinced - there were those who thought them unsightly and others who were adamant that it was wrong to take up common land for such things.

This argument had dragged on and on although an Act of Parliament in 1894 had given power to enclose parts of such lands, and the Mammoth Show was regularly held on Jesus Green, with fences being erected around it to keep gatecrashers out.

Then in 1913 the Council had agreed to turn Jesus Green and Lammas Land into recreation areas - which meant abolishing the ancient rights for people to keep their cattle or horses on these stretches of grassland. Now the opposition almost overshadowed the other Great War - a war which saw the commons filled with the tents of the military, artillery parked on Coldham's Common, bayonet practice on Butt Green and drilling on Parkers Piece.

In 1922 another Act of Parliament increased the Council's power over the common lands - they could now restrict grazing on Lammas Land and Jesus Green, they could legally build the swimming pool on grass which some considered sacred. Surely it was a small price to pay for such a welcome amenity.

But councillors were also faced with other problems including the great growth of motor traffic, and the need for a new road to Newnham to relieve pressure on the central streets.

Nine separate schemes were then being discussed but the obvious solution was to push a route over Coe Fen. Opponents argued that such a road would be ugly and would spoil the amenities of the area - it was "some monstrosity they had conjured up" but to no avail, a public inquiry in February 1924 was to find in favour of the scheme and the road opened in 1926. That was also the year that a new sports pavilion opened near the new swimming pool. Jesus Green was now truly a fine recreation ground and the old Mammoth Show was finally given its marching orders - perhaps in this motor age it was just too common.

Stories from a year – 1924 by Mike Petty

Crowds packed Cambridge Market Square in April 1924. They had come to hear the Kin, but he was not there. However, his voice was and the speech he made when opening the Exhibition at Wembley was broadcast over the new wireless system.

Cambridge was already aware of the wonder of wireless. Two years before at the Royal Show held at Trumpington a local company had set up a demonstration, only to find its reception interrupted by the voice of a pilot of a cross-channel biplane who was commenting on the weather in somewhat "blue" RAF language.

William George Pye was not dismayed. He had started up in business making instruments in 1896, the year that Lord Rutherford transmitted the first radio signals from the Cavendish Laboratory to Madingley Road observatory. But it was the drop in the scientific instrument market in 1921 that encouraged him to switch to the production of wireless receivers.

His trade was given a boost with the beginning of public broadcasting at the end of 1922 and more and more people were attracted by the new technology. Pye, however, could neither afford to mount a major advertising campaign nor meet the demand it might attract so it was left to Harold Pye to leave his home in Grange Road and distribute leaflets to cycle shops, electrical retailers and garages in his bull nosed Morris Cowley.

Receivers were in their infancy and the Cambridge Daily News started a series of articles instructing its readers in the use of the equipment. Many built their own and were rewarded by the crackles that came through their earphones.

By 1925 the "Mammoth Show" committee launched an appeal to provide Addenbrooke's Hospital with a headphone at every bed and many would have listened three years later when the King's College carol service was broadcast for the first time.

Pye continued to flourish, adopting the "Rising Sun" design for the front of their sets in 1929, and much later pioneering stereo sound and the transistor radio. It was Pye too who demonstrated the first Cambridge radio station at the Royal Show in 1960. Six years later the city Council decided not to bid to be one of the first BBC experimental VHF stations.

Proposals for a Commercial radio station were aired in 1971 and Cambridge Free Radio started pirate transmission but it was to be July 1980 before Hereward Radio broadcast local news from its Peterborough studios.

In May 1982 BBC Radio Cambridgeshire went on air for the first time to be followed this year by the Histon-based CN, FM one of whose presenters, David Hamilton had himself made news in May 1974 when his live broadcast for Radio One was cut short as his punt was attacked by some 300 young rowdies.

Fewer turned out when the new station broadcast from Market Hill recently showing that radio may reach thousands more than in April 1924 but cannot match the excitement of hearing voices from the air for the first time.

Stories from a Year - 1926

The General Strike of May 1926 found Cambridge divided. In the “Red Romsey” area across Mill Road bridge railwaymen stopped work, and in the True Blue central Cambridge undergraduates did likewise. The University gave time off studying for any that wished to respond to the call and keep the country going at this time of need. And as the time of need coincided with the time of examinations many were only too happy to oblige.

Over 2,000 students took the opportunity for work experience in professions normally denied to men of their breeding. Upper-class gentlemen could be found working as labourers at the docks in Grimsby, maintaining the peace as Special Constables in London, or keeping the wheels of transport rolling. On the Tubes, on the buses, lorries or trams the Cambridge accent could be heard.

Some could fulfil every schoolboy’s dream and play on the trains. It was imperative that the trains be kept running so that food supplies could be maintained – and also so that undergraduates could be despatched to the places where their services as strike-breakers were in demand. Many however travelled by car with daily convoys leaving the Backs and heading off to all points of the compass. Others found work nearer home.

Whilst the Baptist and Methodist churches on Mill Road, Cambridge, opened their doors to local striking railwaymen, a Chesterton town councillor made his way to the station and on the first day of the strike found himself driving a locomotive to Sudbury. His companions on the footplate included a number of undergraduates. One was the son of a former chief of the Conservative Association, there was a member of the Macintosh toffee family, Lord Hinchingsbrooke from Huntingdon, two rowing Blues, a White Russian émigré and the son of a Newcastle manufacturer.

A newspaper correspondent joined two undergraduates from St John’s College for a trip on the footplate, one stoking the furnace whilst the other kept watch with the driver for obstructions on the line. They found the work dirty and hard, and the twelve-hour shift was somewhat different from their usual labour at college. It was all good fun.

The strikers found their fun in cricket matches on Parker’s Piece, in sports on the Rec and a concert in Romsey School. They also found great amusement when an engine went off the rails in their own heartland near Mill Road Bridge. Hundreds of strikers turned out to mock and chaff at the students’ misfortune.

Then came the tragic news of a fatal accident at Bishop’s Stortford where a good train had rammed a passenger train waiting at the platform. The impact lifted two carriages off the track and smashed the station awning, two men waiting on the platform were killed.

The strike was soon over, the Unions beaten. Some local railway strikers were victimised, as was the one engine driver who had reported for duty. For the students it was the end of a great adventure; they had been to places and done things that had given them a new outlook on life – but the dreaded examinations were still waiting for them.

Stories from a year: 1927

In January 1927 a daughter telephoned her mother. Nothing unusual about that, except that the caller was 300 years old and was speaking from America. In the first Trans Atlantic telephone call to be received in Cambridge President Lowell of Harvard University spoke to senior members of the University of Cambridge including the Master of Emmanuel College which numbered amongst its old boys the John Harvard after whom the American college was named

Newspaper correspondents reported the thrill of the occasion akin, they said, to Columbus sighting land. They commented on the technical feat involved, the call travelling via Boston and New York, then "through the ether" to Rugby and finally down to the switchboard at the Cambridge telephone exchange in the usual way. Reception was somewhat "mushy" but nothing worse than was often experienced in domestic calls. Much of the conversation reflected the formality of the occasion, an exchange of greetings and ideals but once others joined in more mundane matters were discussed. It was Sir Ernest Rutherford who introduced the inevitable topic of the weather informing the New World that in the Old it had been snowing.

Though they had spanned the Atlantic in 1927 the Post Office experienced great difficulty getting through to Sandringham in January 1936. As news that the King's life was moving peacefully to its close journalists flocked to the Norfolk estate. They chose as their base the Feathers Hotel at Dersingham, its one telephone together with the one outside kiosk their only means of communicating the news to the Empire. Engineers immediately set about providing the extra lines needed. Heavy snow had blocked all roads, the AA advising that no driver, however skilful, could force a heavily loaded wagon through the surrounding drifts. Undaunted the Post Office made it. Round the clock they struggled to string cables along hedgerows, loop them over cottage roofs or tie them to trees or electric light poles. Soon there were thirteen telephones to be shared amongst the ninety reporters. The technicians watched as the body of their King left Sandringham on a gun carriage without pomp or pageantry. By the time they returned to their digs the story had travelled around the world.

The hard work involved in erecting telephone lines has been recalled by Ernie Gill in his marvellous unpublished memoirs of life "From muck spreader to Mayor". In it he describes his part in erecting new wires between Cambridge and Norwich in 1919, sweating with pick and shovel throughout a long working day then cycling home at night.

The earliest recognised telephones in Cambridge were installed by the South of England Telephone Company in 1892 based in Alexandra Street and taken over by the Post office in 1912. However the honour of owning the very first telephone in Cambridge was claimed by an Undergraduate at Pembroke College in 1878. He fixed up two between his 'diggings' in St Andrews Street and a summer house at the bottom of the garden. The little retreat was an excellent place for an illicit game of cards and the telephone allowed his landlord to give warning of any approaching Proctor.

Stories from a year – 1928 by Mike Petty

In July 1928 the Cambridge Preservation Society was up in arms over a Council plan; the Cambridge Drawing Society was also adamant that their proposals would be tantamount to turning a most ancient area into "something like a concrete tea garden".

The site under dispute was derelict; the two ancient mills that had stood side by side facing Mill Pool for 900 years had been swept away the previous year without much murmuring. They were obviously obsolete once Ebenezer Foster had erected his new steam mill in Station Road.

Before the advent of steam it had been water power that turned the mill wheels of the three watermills on Mill Pool. Two shared the same roof; one called the Bishop's Mill had belonged to the Abbot of Ely at the time of the Domesday survey, the second known as the King's Mill had been erected shortly after. A third, just across Mill Pool at Newnham and formerly known as Mortimer Mill still stands.

Elaborate arrangements had been devised during the centuries to govern which mill had first call on the small amount of water that tumbled into the Mill Pool. In 1566 it was decreed that the King's Mill was the most important. No other Mill could operate until it had started or continue after it finished. The adjacent miller could well see what was happening but the miller at Newnham had to be warned by blowing on a horn or sending a runner to give him notice. All this must have been most annoying and in 1634 that the Newnham miller encouraged some boys to blow their own horn so that he could start work at his own convenience.

The power of steam brought the era to an end. First a steam engine was installed making the Mills less dependent on water power – a facility featured by the Auctioneers when the property came up for sale in 1842. Both were acquired by Ebenezer Bird Foster who bought the Bishop's Mill outright and leased the King's from the Corporation. But then came the second steam invasion – the railway – and Foster erected new mills in Station Road, though he renewed his lease in 1879 for another 40 years.

By 1911 motorists were urging a better road link to Newnham and somebody suggested a new bridge across the Mill Pool. It would mean demolishing the old mills and the Corporation bought out Foster's interests. Inevitably the scheme collapsed and the premises which were old and dilapidated could not be relet and became derelict. After 15 years the University suggested a swap for land they owned in Corn Exchange Street, the council preferred a case deal and the University offered £2,500 for the site.

As negotiations dragged on so the Mills got worse and in 1927 the old buildings were demolished. Somebody thought it an ideal place for a new mortuary but then Messrs. Reynolds and Scudamore applied to buy it for a boat house. In the end the Council decided not to sell but to erect a boat house themselves, reconstruct the sluices and slipway and construct a weir and footbridge.

It was the suggestion that the ancient arches through which the mill race had roared for centuries were to be swept away that caused the Artists and Preservationists to rise in anger. Plans were redrawn and the archways retained.

Once more the Mill Pool is packed with craft but now punts jostle where once seagoing boats loaded the flour produced with the aid of the water that still thunders as it had since before the Colleges were founded.

Stories from a year - 1929

The Great War brought with it the threat of invasion. It was feared that the Germans might land on the East coast and that there would be need to transport men and munitions speedily from the Midlands to the Coast. The Military sprung into action and built a fine new road between Stretham and Wicken to replace the previous droves that were the only link. Once Wicken was reached the route to Soham and beyond was already well established. Wicken people rejoiced at the prosperity the new road would bring - its fine village greens would make excellent staging posts for the cavalry and probably mechanised troops would pause

there as well. Yet the great new road brought no great increase in traffic since nobody could decide who should pay for the fine new bridges that would be needed to cross the Rivers Old West and Cam. So nobody built them until the war was over and the battle of words finally resolved. Yet there was another approach from the west - along the river bank to Upware, crossing at the ferry by the "Five Miles from Anywhere - No Hurry" inn. In this isolated corner of fenland Cambridge undergraduates had in 1851 established their own "Republic" with its own President, Minister of Education, Interpreter and State Fiddler. Its members included young men later to make their names in life - such as Henry Arthur Morgan, subsequently Master of Jesus college, Samuel Butler the author and a certain James Clerk Maxwell, famous Director of the Cavendish Laboratory in whose honour the world's scientists journeyed to Cambridge in 1931. Once the Republic has ceased a "King" arose to take its place - a muscular fellow who delighted in defending his title against all comers, be they coprolite diggers from the adjacent villages or bargees carrying commodities along the lodes to Burwell, Reach or Wicken. The area was undrained and unspoiled, a haunt of wildfowl and fish, but even then the drainers were working on the last of the great meres, Whittlesey, converting the wetland to dry lands. A steam pump had been installed at Upware in 1821, soon that whole area would also be tamed. But just next door at Wicken the wetlands remained and in 1899 part was presented to the National Trust. Now other Cambridge students - of botany and moths rather than beer and music - would surely find the habitat preserved for study. Yet in August 1929 the night sky was illuminated, not with candles to attract moths but with flames that were searing through the dry sedge. The wind kept it away from the village but sent it deeper into the fen. Soham fire brigade were soon on the scene, to be joined by t-hose from Cambridge but as darkness fell the scene of wild grandeur was visible for miles around. Cars and cycles brought onlookers to the scene but in the fen itself the steady work of the fire fighters, beating out the flames was winning. By midnight - 9 hours after it started - the danger was over. Seventy acres - one tenth of its area - was now merely black wasteland but the black peatland that surrounded it was safe and soon the swallowtails would be back, as would the botanists to study and the visitors to gaze on this last area of untamed fenland.

Stories from a year - 1930

On 4th June 1930 the headlines were full of tragedy; three undergraduates were dead, one killed by his own pistol, the others by an Ortona bus. The common link was a motorcycle and a yearning for excitement.

Two Pembroke undergraduates, one a double-barrelled young man from Midlothian, the other a Swiss citizen, left Cambridge shortly after 3pm en route for Ely on their Norton motorcycle. They headed, "hell-for-leather" said one witness, down the Milton road and past the new £579 council houses that the Corporation were selling off in weekly instalments. The dust they kicked up settled on the wide green verges that had been laid precisely for this purpose. As they neared the level crossing they found the gates closed but turned up the throttle even more.

The crossing-keeper gave evidence that he always followed instructions and kept his gate closed to road traffic. He had seen the Ortona bus approaching from Milton but could do nothing to speed his journey until the two trains he was expecting had passed by. Anyway buses had to get used to delay. Nothing however need stop the motorcyclist since there was always the underpass on the right-hand side of the crossing. And down the tunnel the undergraduates roared, shooting up into the sunlight on the other side.

It was then that the bus driver saw them. He had already sounded his horn put out his hand to signal that he was keeping to the upper road, and was approaching at 12 mph when the Norton leapt out from the tunnel and smashed into the front of his bus. There was nothing that could be done except call for the police. Both students died instantly.

The third lingered for four hours before succumbing from his gunshot wounds, the policeman he murdered outlived him by half a day; his tutor was already dead.

The young man was always eccentric, had a reputation for being clever and was reading history. He also played the drums in a jazz band and had hired a grand piano which he kept in his room at Kings. Unlike most of his college he wasn't rich or famous, he hadn't been to Eton, and he didn't have the finance to maintain the lifestyle he adopted. He wore garish sweaters and plus-fours, claimed to be a Russian prince and ran up debts.

He also stole a pistol, teamed up with a friend from Fitzwilliam, changed his name and spent the merry month of May touring Cambridgeshire pubs in a second-hand car. When the money ran out they traded the car for a motorbike and set off for London where they found excitement, glamour and company in the flat of a girl named Madge. She worked in a nightclub, had a heart of gold and seemed used to strange young men popping in for a while. By the end of the weekend she knew these two were different. They obviously had money problems and had written to Cambridge for clothes they could pawn. They also had guns.

When they went to collect the parcel of clothes they found two men waiting who invited the runaways to return to Cambridge. Their escort were fellow undergrads - after all there was nothing that a little chat could not sort out.

As luck would have it the Kingsman met his tutor in Trumpington Street. The two strolled off to sort things out over a glass of sherry in rooms in the Gibbs building beside the Chapel. A third figure followed. During their friendly chat a knock came at the door. The plain-clothed policeman had just started to read out his warrant when the first of five shots rang out, hitting him in the shoulder.

When the gunfire ceased the Police had a murdered colleague to bury with full honours, the College a famous explorer to mourn and the University had lost three undergraduates in a week._

Stories from a year: 1931

Today one side of Cambridge Market Square is a jumble of scaffolding and steel as work proceeds to rebuild the north-east corner for a new shop. 1931 saw similar development but then they were building what has just been demolished - the Victoria Cinema. It opened in September with 1,500 guests and contributed to the Golden Age of cinema - indeed in 1931 10,000 miles of film were projected in Cambridge cinemas alone - laid end to end it would stretch to Hollywood - and 5 million patrons could be accommodated in the four principal cinemas.

The cinema had first come to Cambridge as part of Tudor's circus in October 1896; shortly afterwards films were shown in the Guildhall and the Corn Exchange. The first regular shows were held in the YMCA lecture hall and the Working Men's Club; Sturton Town Hall and the Roller Skating Rink were amongst the venues but the first purpose-built building opened in Mill Road in 1913. Although the films in those early days were silent the cinemas were not. First there was the musical accompaniment which varied from a single piano to the eight-piece orchestra at the Central Cinema. Then there would be the sound effects - cocoa-nut shells for horses hooves and a drum to represent canon fire in the popular newsreels about life in the King's army - although the operator was not always quick enough to keep up

with the action. The deaf were at no disadvantage in the silent movie days - many of them could lip-read and were better informed than the rest of the audience - though this had its drawbacks and one party of deaf and dumb children were quickly ushered out of the Playhouse in Mill Road when their teachers realised they could understand too well just what the shell-shocked victims of the Battle of the Somme were silently mouthing. And then there would be those who could hear but not read very well - and would insist on repeating the sub-titles very loudly to the great annoyance of the rest of the audience.

The Talkies arrived in Cambridge in August 1929 with the musical 'Broadway Melody'. Some thought it just a novelty that would soon wear off - silent pictures offered a haven of peace from the rush and turmoil outside. Most agreed that their music was very pleasant though they deplored the all-dominant American accents. As the developments continued first one cinema then another was erected and rebuilt. In July 1931 the Rendezvous in Cambridge was destroyed by fire - there were more customers for the new Victoria. Subsequently the Vic was restyled in 1952 in a "eurythmic" design - "designer, architect and illuminators combining to make a symphony of shape, colour and tone". New and modern projectors came in 1967, a second screen in 1972; it recovered from a fire in 1983 but rumours of redevelopment were persistent and it -closed in 1988. Today all that remains of The Victoria is memories and a 1931 facade held together with steel

Stories from a year: 1931 county variant!

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Of course you did not have to come to the towns to see films, many villages had travelling cinemas. Thurston's the fair people took their Electric Vaudeville to Soham and perhaps this is what prompted 'Nick Knack' Taylor to convert his coach builders workshop into a permanent cinema there in about 1912. It was one of four cinemas to function there at one time or another.

At Burwell the Gardiner Memorial Hall was used for film shows soon after the Great War, its popularity waning when the Doric opened at Newmarket in 1937. At the time it was reputed to have the biggest balcony in East Anglia, outrivaling the older Kingsway and Victoria cinemas which also stood in High Street

Ely's first film shows were held in the Public Rooms although the Electric Cinema in Market Street opened about 1912, followed by the Majestic in Newnham Street and in 1929 by the Rex Littleport filmgoers could choose from the Electric Cinema, (later renamed the Cinema Theatre and The Empire) which was established in the Public Hall in 1913 or the Regal which opened just before the Second World War and was hit by incendiaries in October 1940 (ironically when showing the film "On the night of the fire")

At Haverhill cinema goers flocked to the Electric Empire in High Street, later renamed the Playhouse. Early cinemas had little of the latter-day comforts; sometimes as at Soham they had rough walls, a corrugated iron roof, the floor was just earth, the seats wooden benches. The only heating was a small coke stove, the projector was operated by gaslight, the films often went astray and if they did arrive had to be operated by hand and would frequently break - causing the audience to whistle, cat-call and stamp their feet.

But despite it all people came to see cowboys and Indians, Harold Lloyd, the Keystone cops and the rest together with the serial such as the Adventures of Pearl White which each week left the heroine in another impossible situation from which she could surely not escape ...

The films in those early days were silent - but the cinemas were not. First there was the musical accompaniment which varied from a single piano - as at Soham - to the eight-piece orchestra at the Central Cinema Cambridge. Then there would be the sound effects - cocoa-nut shells for horses hooves and a drum to represent canon fire in the popular newsreels about life in the King's army - but the operator was not always quick enough to keep up with the action.

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Some thought it just a novelty that would soon wear off - silent pictures offered a haven of peace from the rush and turmoil outside. Most agreed that their music was very pleasant though they deplored the all-dominant American accents. Today those accents issue from innumerable television sets and cinemas are few and far between. Yet more and more films are being hired from video shops which have sprung up in villages around the county. Although there are plans for a new multi-screen complex in Cambridge all that remains of The Victoria is memories and a 1931 facade held together with steel

Stories from a Year – 1932

1988 12 08

By 1932 Cambridge was reported as responding to a Government appeal to sell gold, jewellery and trinkets to help the national financial crisis.

"This is the time to spend — buy new clothes, furniture or extra food. Have your house decorated or painted. A prompt response to this appeal will lift thousands of homes from misery into happiness by Christmas."

The Cambridge Master Builders took out an advertisement to emphasise the problem: "Do you realise that 1,653 able-bodied men are totally unemployed in your own town. Do you realise that one of this appalling total 543 men are of the building trade." The corporation initiated new house-building schemes to give employment.

The suicide rate rose, despair continued and the international situation became graver. But during the war years the unemployment situation lessened due in part to "Butlins" — the "in" name for the government offices established at Brooklands Avenue which boosted central government employment by 35 per cent.

In 1959 the employment exchange was moved there from Newnham and reported that there were only 340 men and 67 women unemployed in the area, compared to 1,400 in July 1938.

"All-out drive to lure workers to pricey Cambridge" read the headlines in 1973 — sentiments repeated almost exactly today. "Shops have difficulty attracting staff, firms move away and

leaflets are distributed in Lion Yard begging for workers. The windows of the job centre — now once more in Guildhall Street — are full of positions, but not for the Scotsmen on the benches in Lion Yard who still epitomise the degradation and misery bemoaned by their compatriot 87 years ago (Stories from a year — 1911).

"Why are there so many hard-working men on the scrapheap, living a life of degradation and misery?" These were the sentiments of an Aberdeen man, one of the first to use the newly-opened labour exchange in Guildhall Street in 1911. His quest for work had been unsuccessful.

Through the hardships of the 1920s and 1930s soup kitchens were opened to soften the pangs of hunger and the Town Council initiated a series of measures to find work for the unemployed. The sports facilities on Jesus Green and the paving stones along Queens Road are testimony to some of the job-creation schemes undertaken. Roads were constructed to serve the soon to be developed acres off Cherry Hinton Road and long-delayed schemes re-assessed.

One of these was the revival of a project to relieve traffic congestion in Silver Street and make better communication with Newnham that had been long mooted — indeed the need for such a route had been voiced at the opening of Victoria Bridge in 1889. There was great opposition with nine separate schemes drawn up in 1923 and "if not for the urgency of the unemployment position we should be in the same position today, only instead of nine there would have been nineteen."

Such was the opinion of the Mayor in December, 1916 when the Fen Causeway was formally opened. It had given employment to 90 men during a two-year period.

Stories from a year - 1933

By June 1933 some ten years work was coming to an end as the dredging of the River Cam was nearly complete. A steam dredger had been used in 1923 and one decade later so much soil had been removed that it could have covered Parker's Piece to a depth of nearly seven feet. The Conservators of the Cam were convinced that there would be no need for any more clearance for 30 years.

The maintenance of the River had always been a concern, many recalled the great flood of 1895 - the year that the scheme to divert sewage which flowed untreated from the colleges along the Backs away from the River to underground pipes leading to Cheddar's Lane pumping station had been initiated. Then in 1909 there had been more dredging - which was supposed to stop floods. But in 1914, 1916, 1918 and 1919 the old enemy, flooding, had returned - at precisely the time when resources had to be diverted to fighting the new enemy, Germany.

But the struggle to tame the river is much older than all this. One person who joined the fray was Charles Humfrey, in 1829. A banker by profession he turned his eyes to river banks instead, surveying the stretch of water from Mill Pool to Clayhithe which was the responsibility of the Cam Conservators, set up by Act of Parliament in 1702 to ensure that the barges on which Cambridge depended for its supplies should still be able to navigate, despite the activities of the Drainers - the interests of the one - who needed water to float the barges, conflicting with the other - who wanted to get rid of water as quickly as possible.

Despite their efforts there were complaints that the river was not deep enough for the 20 ton barges that were allowed to ply up to Cambridge. These vessels needed a depth of 2 ft 8 inches - Humfrey found the Cam to be at least 3 feet deep everywhere - and in some places there was nearly 10 feet of water. But the boatmen continued to claim that it took them as long to get from Kings Lynn to Clayhithe as it did from Clayhithe to the town.

Humfrey solved the mystery of the missing water. The River below Clayhithe was too shallow and the Conservators' water was being used to flush the barges over the shoals, emptying the Cam in the process. No wonder they then had to wait until the depth built up again. Various proposals were put forward - build a new sluice at Clayhithe, remove those at Baitsbite and Chesterton, do away with the old wooden construction in front of the Fort St George and put in a new lock further along Jesus Green. Then deepen the whole river to prevent the constant flooding along Midsummer Common which made the area an unhealthy swamp (especially with the sewage drifting down from the "Backs").

There was the additional problem of the stretch between Magdalene and Silver Street bridges. It could easily take half a day to make the journey, with the horses straining to pull against the tide and the bargees pushing with their "spread". And when they did get to Mill Pool they often found it so congested there was no room for them to enter and needed to moor alongside the college walls with their string of barges stretching down the Backs. Humfrey recommended that a series of posts be placed in the bed of the river and that the barges be winched up by pulleys mounted in the front of the lead boat. Journey time could be cut to an hour and academic calm restored. This idea, like most of his others, found few supporters.

The inmates of Colleges with apartments near the River continue to complain of the noise from the river but the working boats are now pleasure craft & Bargees' curses have changed to tourist laughter. The Cam which once brought commerce to the town now acts as a commercial for it._

Stories from a year 1934

January 29th 1934 started as just an ordinary day for Percy Titmous. By the time it was over he was world famous, In the words of the New York Herald Tribune he had become a "motorized knight", a Launcelot who'd rescued his Queen from dire distress.

Queen Mary was a regular visitor to Cambridge, in fact her honeymoon train had paused here briefly when en route to Sandringham in 1893. In 1918 she visited Papworth Hospital and the Cambridge military hospital in Burrell's Walk with King George V. Three years later they returned to inspect the National Institute of Agricultural Botany where crowds glimpsed a tall Imperial lady inside the smoothly running Royal car,

It was the car that betrayed what was to have been a secret visit in 1932 to the Fitzwilliam Museum. The Royal car had again been spotted in January 1934 parked outside the Cambridge Tapestry Works in Thompson's Lane and then in St Andrew's Street whilst her Majesty chose numerous tiny ivory objects for her famous Dolls House from Woolston's antiques shop.

Three weeks later she was due to return. The police were alerted that the Royal car had left and were keeping the route clear so that the Daimler should have an unimpeded run. In fact it was nothing of the sort. Three times the limousine broke down through overheating, finally coming to rest outside the Slap Up public house at Waterbeach.

It was here that Percy found them. His wife suggested he turn round to see if they needed assistance, but how do you approach a Queen. Percy paused some way off and waited for a sign. Soon the Lady in Waiting approached to explain the predicament and ask whether the Queen might hitch a lift to Cambridge in their little car.

The constables charged with keeping the road free from traffic tried several times to intercept the Titmous vehicle, only to jump aside when they recognised the passenger. Even Cambridge crowds normally used to anything were stunned they saw the Queen arrive in such a car. Queen Mary did her shopping, took tea at the Copper Kettle, and continued her journey to Exning and Sandringham in a replacement Royal limousine

Percy Titmous himself tried to slip away unobserved, but somebody had taken his car number and a call to the Council offices soon elicited his name. The news spread quickly and soon pressmen, news agencies and even film companies were hot on his trail.

The American newspapers were full of the story: "Queen Mary Thumbs Ride as Auto Quits" ran one headline which went on to describe how "townspeople stared in amazement from the sidewalks".

The Queen herself seemed unperturbed by the incident; her visits to Antiques shops continued unabated, as did her motoring adventures. In May 1939 her car was involved in an accident; on another occasion she got lost in the lanes around Six Mile Bottom causing her escort considerable anxiety and in August 1948 the Royal limo again broke down again at Lt Thetford Corner

History was not allowed to repeat itself however and this time she continued her journey in a police car.

Queen Mary was a great favourite with the people of Cambridge and her death in 1953 was keenly felt. Amongst those present at the funeral service in St George's chapel, Windsor, was Stanley Woolston, proprietor of the Antique shop she visited in a subject's car.

Stories from a year - 1935

Crossing the road could be difficult.

Ely was a case in point; in the early 1800s Fore Hill was, in bad weather, in a worse state than any fen drove. The ruts were so deep that most of the horse drawn vehicles couldn't get down them and large pieces of timber were placed across the street in various places so pedestrians could cross without being sucked into the mire.

Various views of Cambridge streets show somewhat similar situation but as the twentieth century arrived it was the amount of traffic that was the problem. A cartoon in the Cambridge Graphic of 1900 summarised the difficulties; seeing courteous drivers giving way to an elderly lady crossing on the arm of a kindly policeman one gentleman decides to try the same trick. Grabbing a likely escort he launches himself into the maelstrom only to find that it was the blue of the uniform, rather than the blue of the lady's eyes that had earned the passage.

Soon the horse traffic was being supplemented by the motor car with some drivers in 1904 making an effort to register their vehicles in Cambridge rather than London to take advantage of the more attractive number plates - the London registration was the letter "A" followed by four numbers, whereas here it was "CE" followed by just two figures. By then the number of licenced motor cars had rocketed from 27 in January up to 42 by April. By 1905 things were worse: it was doubtful whether any town of similar size had as many motors and motorcycles

running about the streets as Cambridge in term time. Whereas once the problem had been the speeding cyclist now it was these mechanical monsters scorching by at 30-40 mph - although in 1909 a taxi driver was fined £2 for driving at the dangerous speed of 10-12 mph and by 1913 there was a speed limit of 15 mph in any inhabited part of the borough.

Various improvements were needed to make things safer. In 1916 the first traffic island was installed at the junction of Victoria Avenue and Chesterton Road. It was a wooden structure carried into the centre of the road every morning and removed each evening - much to the amusement of residents, though it was 1932 before the "Milton road merry-go-round" - Mitcham's corner roundabout was installed permanently.

The first one-way system started in Market Street and Petty Cury in 1925 and was followed two years later by the first traffic lights at the bottom of Castle Hill. They were supposed to release the policeman usually stationed there on point duty but - according to some sources - in fact meant that two police were needed - one to explain the system to befuddled motorists and the other to hold back the crowds of onlookers enchanted by the pretty changing lights.

By 1934 there were complaints that sometimes cars and bicycles were parked so closely in line in Petty Cury and Sidney Street that pedestrians could not find a space to cross over. Councillors debated long and hard, then decided to experiment with what one of them called "Orange Groves". By then the traffic congestion was so bad that the newspaper did not think they would be much use but the Belisha Beacons were installed in Market Street, Petty Cury, Emmanuel road and outside the Jolly Waterman at Mitcham's Corner in July 1935. The operation was conducted during the University vacation - what would the undergraduates make of them?

Within a week one of the orange globes - which it was claimed were tamper proof - was found lying in the roadway; the Beacon in Petty Cury suffered the same fate nights later. Those that did remain were "decorated" by student artists, though police vigilance removed the painted faces before many had chance to appreciate their handiwork. But the decision was made and despite their attraction - 34 stolen between January and April 1955 - the Beacons lit the way for pedestrians until the advent of "Zebra" crossings in 1952 and the modern "Pelican" in 1971._

Stories from a year - 1936

Just across the river from Cambridge lay the little village of Chesterton, a prime site for development and the Inclosure Act of 1840 made the land available Edward Meadows, a brewer, saw his chance.

It was an area he knew well, being variously publican at the Fort St George, landlord of the Jolly Waterman and builder of the Portland Arms. Edward paid £1,200 for the old East Farthing Meadows in 1843 and by next year he had constructed a Road down to the river and started selling off building plots in Ferry Path. Elsewhere others were doing likewise and the new residents could stroll into town across the lush green commons separated from their homes only by the lush green stinking river Cam into which the town's sewage poured without check.

Several ferries plied across the river, the ferrymen making a useful living from the tolls they charged and the residents not being too inconvenienced by the delay in crossing. Sometimes people took themselves across, turning the handle that engaged the chain that ran across the bed of the river although when the ferry was on the other side it had to be pulled over by tugging on the chain itself, slimy - and worse - from the depths of the river.

Cambridge councillors meanwhile looked with dismay at the good folk of Chesterton who were using their facilities but not contributing to their rates. They tried to encourage them to become part of a greater Cambridge. One inducement proffered was a new road bridge to replace William Bates' ferry. In 1888 Chestertonians voted for the bridge, but then declined the amalgamation. Development continued apace.

Whilst the residents of Ferry Path were content to cross the river in the traditional way occupants of the new houses on the De Freville Estate were soon campaigning for something better - a footbridge. The tragic loss of life when a ferry sank at Fen Ditton in 1905 would have added fuel to their cause but no bridges were to be forthcoming whilst Chesterton was independent.

In 1913 the Borough council, having won its battle to absorb Chesterton, decided that a bridge was indeed necessary at Ferry Path, though it was another 14 years before it actually opened. William Pauley had operated the ferry since 1887 and carried an estimated one and a quarter million passengers. Those waiting to make a last nostalgic crossing were disappointed when the ferry sank just before the new bridge opened. Further downstream the Cutter ferry, worked for years by the Dant family, was also superseded by a footbridge, though it was brought back into use five years later when the bridge needed repairs.

Thus New Chesterton was up-to-date. But Old Chesterton still had to rely on the two ferries opposite the Green Dragon in Water Street. One was a heavily built craft that could carry horses and cattle across to Stourbridge Common, alongside it a light passenger ferry. When the river had been lowered in October 1920 to allow repairs at Baitsbite lock the two had been placed across the river with planks crossing the gap between them but this was only a temporary expedient.

Throughout 1935 they watched as foundations were put in, they listened to the thud of the pile driver in November but it was May 1936 before the bridge was actually open. The smaller ferry was repositioned near Banham's boatyard and was used by the engineers constructing the latest link between Chesterton and Cambridge - Elizabeth Bridge

_ Stories from a year - 1937

The High spring tides coincide with heavy rain.

The great sluice at Denver cannot be opened to allow the rivers to empty into the sea and more and more water drains into the fenland river system.

The high river banks are full to the brim and are crumbling and dissolving in the water just as sugar dissolves in tea. Slips occur, the bank slides a bit, but as it threatens to break men rush to bolster it up with clay and sandbags.

The banks themselves are already two feet higher because of these lines of sacks but still the water seeps through and strong winds blow sheets of water out from the river and down into the adjoining fen - fen that is itself a sea of mud - comparable with the mud of Flanders. "The way feet sink in with a dull sucking noise reminds me of the time when we moved into Passchendale during the war".

The sodden fen means that lorries cannot get near to bring bags - potato bags, sandbags - any sort of bag and the sodden land itself is unsuitable for filling them. 10,000 bags have been laid since yesterday morning and the water is seeping through at the places they placed the bags yesterday afternoon

The men are willing but almost at the end of their tether. Most are now so tired that if some really terrible disaster came along they would hardly be any use at all.

Throughout the fen, along the top of river and drain every available man - hundreds of men, wet and weary, watch the water in the river while even more rain penetrates their clothing and the incessant cold wind chills them even more.

There is talk of calling in the army and at Ely a bugler is standing by to sound a "fall-in" for volunteers in the event of a major burst. The town criers at Haddenham and Swavesey are appealing for extra men to go to the aid of Willingham, just one of the danger points.

Barway and Lt Thetford have breached and the main A10 is cut by flooding near Stretham - the car loads of undergraduates flocking to help must find another way on to the Isle of Ely.

The BBC broadcasts flood warnings urging people to alert their neighbours without wireless sets to listen for the church bells which will announce the time has come for evacuation. For many families it is already too later. Their land is under water, their homes are flooded.

"We fenland folk can stand a lot. The water has got to be coming over the doorstep before we begin to flit. A horseman tells me that the water has reached his front door... his wife is sweeping it away with a broom". It is the worst flood for many years - worse than 1928, worse than last year. It is March 1937. "We've got out of scrapes before, and we'll get out of this one" says a fen farmer.

He is right. The floods of March 1937 are now largely forgotten. They were only a minor dampness compared to the devastation that was to follow ten years later.

Stories from a year - 1938

The plane was kept in the barn between a hay-tedder and a horse-rack, neglected for weeks at a time until the morning brought big white clouds and the spring air was soft. Then it was time to open the barn doors, to flush the brown hen from her clutch of eggs in the cockpit and brush away the hay dust, the straws dropped by the nest-building sparrows and the bird muck on the wings. Push the plane into the meadow, turn the propeller a time or two and then off and away.

It was David Garnett's dream since the afternoon in October 1929 when he had left his Hilton home for a stroll with his wife across the fields to Conington. The peace of the countryside was disturbed by the buzz of an engine as an aeroplane climbed, dived and landed in the farmer's field. They pushed through the hedge and strolled to the little shed where a group of young men were standing beside a light car and a couple of motorcycles. Did they give joy-rides - yes, come back in twenty minutes.

They walked around the small village, past the church and back to the field - what had they let themselves in for. Soon the plane was down again and one of them had to be first. David picked up his courage and climbed awkwardly into the cockpit, hitting his head as he did so. He gripped the side of the cockpit as the machine bumped across the grass, then suddenly they were above the hedges, above the trees and above the thin, narrow-gutted building that was his own house, looking down one of the chimneys as the pilot turned. But then came a dive and with it came panic. He was no longer interested in the view of the dove house or the fields of stubble brushed and combed with horse-rakes. His face was frozen, his hair felt as if it were being torn out by the roots - he would surely be bald by the time they landed - if they

landed - when would they land. Then they were down and it was his wife's turn for her five-minute flip.

The engineer had no change when he paid for their ride - there was 9/- owing out of the pound note and he would have to come back. The second joy ride was followed by a first flying lesson when he actually took the controls, glimpsing the mysteries of stalling, gliding and banking. He landed slightly deaf but fifteen-years younger, very hungry and determined to fly.

By March 1930 the Cambridge Aero Club was losing money, the telephone was disconnected, the machines dispersed. It was inconvenient to undergraduates who had to drive nine miles through twisty by-roads for a twenty-minute lesson. And there was an alternative for in April 1929 an aerodrome had opened on Cambridge's Newmarket Road and in October they too had started giving flying lessons. Many famous aeronauts were to be found there, including Alan Cobham with his Flying Circus and in 1932 council officials were given an opportunity to see their town from the air, flying in a giant air liner.

Soon the airfield was too small and meetings were being held to discuss a new site near Teversham Corner; permission was granted and it opened in October of 1938. By then David Garnett was flying himself; he had followed his old instructor to Ipswich but had still failed to go solo. The journey depressed him as much as his lack of success so in October 1930 he had turned up at Marshalls and tried their Gipsy Moth aircraft. Once adapted by the addition of two cushions so that he could see out of the cockpit he made steady progress and on 22nd July 1931 he found himself in the air alone. He also got down and recorded his reminiscences in "A rabbit in the air" published in 1932, dreaming of his own plane in a barn but in the meantime borrowing one of Arthur Marshall's - as thousands have done since._

Stories from a year - 1939

Perhaps it was somebody's idea of a joke; perhaps they hated capital punishment; perhaps they had consumed too much of the local brew. Whatever the reason there was no doubt. On Sunday night the gibbet was there, by Monday morning it had gone.

The monument in question stood beside the Old North Road at Caxton. It was of no great antiquity, having only been erected in April 1934, using timbers obtained from an old house at Baldock to replace a poor imitation. But it was part of the local folk-lore. It had even featured as a Christmas card - "with the season's greetings" - but who would want a reminder of such a grisly sight to decorate their festive mantelpiece.

It was here, locals remembered that they hung Kaiser Bill in August 1919 - though only in effigy - a fate that was to befall others in later times, including Arthur Scargill in

But as to who had actually been hanged there there is some doubt. One historian recorded the erection of gallows there in about 1346; others tell of seeing the body of a highwayman, the son of a Royston landlady, who had been convicted of robbing the mail coach in about 1753. After four or five months the screw which held the body was filed off and the next high wind brought the body to the ground. An inquisitive Fellow of Trinity College who was passing opened the corpse's clothes to see what a state the body was in and found it dry and not offensive.

There is a story too of a Yorkshireman who committed a murder in the neighbourhood, escaped to America, but returned some years later to the scene of his crime and talked too freely about his activities. He was hanged alive on the gallows to die through exposure or starvation; a passing baker took pity and gave him a loaf of bread. For this he too was hanged.

Then one Sunday night in April 1939 it was cut down, leaving just a stump about six inches high. Eight men carried the carcass with due solemnity into the Hotel yard. The men from the brewery came out post haste and decided that the gibbet should not be allowed to die. Soon a replacement was once more standing near the cross-roads, an attraction to tourists and a deterrent to highwaymen - none of which have been seen near the site since._

Stories from a year – 1940, by Mike Petty

Wartime was no time for preservation. With the threat of bombing, the need to save for warships and the uncertainty of the future who could worry about the past.

Thus the announcement at Easter 1940 that the Cambridgeshire Cottage Preservation Society had finished restoring the group of buildings known as Wright's Row in Grantchester - and had done so without recourse to the public purse - was remarkable. Even more so was the report that two additional cottages adjoining the Row and known as Crossways had been given to the Society and were themselves being reconditioned.

The Society had been formed two years earlier by a small group of people who were saddened to see the derelict cottages scattered everywhere throughout the County. They were part of the rural heritage and, in their decay, picturesque.

They had earlier attracted the attention of another group of people - the Cambridge Antiquarian Society - who had decided in 1904 to build up a pictorial record of the contemporary scene before it was changed forever by "natural decay, accident or wilful destruction". The Cambridgeshire Photographic Survey was revived post-war when various members journeyed to the surrounding villages, collected postcards and took photographs of domestic architecture, barns and farmyards which have now often disappeared. Sometimes the original photographer was less than certain of the name of the street in which he stood to take his picture and today even dedicated village historians have difficulty today identifying all the scenes they recorded.

Their pictures are now in daily use in the Cambridgeshire Collection where people planning to re-restore their cottages take the opportunity of seeing just what it did look like before post-war, and less sympathetic alteration. But whereas the work of the Antiquarian Society members picture the past, the work of the Cottage Preservation Society has allowed it to survive.

In 1940 they were also owners of two cottages at Kingston, for which they paid £80, and three at Orwell, bought for £120. Generally, as at Grantchester, the buildings, although inhabited, had no amenities whatsoever and were in a bad state of repair. The Society turned its attention to its first purchase, a group of cottages at Toft, most of which were covered by a demolition order. But before it could act some were requisitioned for the use of evacuees. A Yorkshire woman, fleeing from Sheffield with her old parents and her children arrived in Toft and worried the authorities into letting her have the oldest of the condemned cottages, promising to make it habitable herself. Neighbours had been emptying their earth closets there along with all manner of rubbish; rats had made it their home and flies infested the cottages. She cleared and cleaned and killed and buried, then moved in.

In 1944 the Society acquired cottages at Landbeach, ten years later 29 cottages in the High Street at Gt Abington were put up for sale and 15 bought for the Society. Next year they bought five cottages in Willingham - for the grand price of £200. The rents then were £18 per year.

Some tenants were not too regular with the rent. At one of their properties at Fen Drayton the occupier claimed nobody had called for the rent for three years and he had not known where to send it. When members of the committee arrived he slowly ascended the creaking stairs and descended with a bag containing the cash. Three years rent came to £30.

When Helen Larke wrote the history of the Cottage Improvement Society in 1970 she stated that they were always on the look out for suitable cottages for sale at a reasonable price. Twenty years later many individuals are also searching for the cottage with roses around the door - and are horrified to see just what a state their dream home was in when the Antiquarian men saw photographed it 60 years ago. The Cottage Improvement Society continue their work, acquiring properties to let to village folk.

compiled 2.4.1990

Stories from a year - 1941

The case before the court was, said the Mayor, "the worst we have ever had". During 1941 many of the offences that had been brought for trial had related to wartime activities - soldiers driving the wrong way down one-way streets, a bigamous marriage to a gunner air sergeant, a waitress undercharging evacuees - "she felt sorry for them" - or theft of Hurricane or Spitfire collecting boxes. This was no exception. It was indeed a shocking offence in a year that had seen Cambridge bombed on several occasions.

They had started on the bitter night of January 16th with something like 200 incendiaries in the vicinity of Hyde Park corner; the Perse school had been hit along with a warehouse in Regent Street. Next morning the sight of the blackened buildings contrasted vividly with a May tree transformed to a solid mass of icicles by the water from the firemen's hoses. Two weeks later the houses beside Mill Road Bridge had been hit and two died.

February saw a bomb in Cherry Hinton road demolish the porch of a house, but on the 24th the raiders returned to the area with Incendiaries followed by High Explosives in Grantchester Meadows and a mixture of both between Hyde Park Corner and Station Road. The three-phase attack killed eleven, including wardens and firewatchers.

A more determined attack with fire bombs came on 9th May when hundreds were showered in the area between Hills Road and Trumpington Road. Fifty houses received direct hits yet all but four were put out within a few minutes with stirrup pumps and sand, testimony to the efficiency of the wardens and Auxiliary Fire Service. Romsey Town was the next area to suffer with ten high explosives; two houses in Great Eastern Street were hit, causing two more deaths and injuries to seven people.

Newspapers were prevented by the censor from identifying the area raided - it was just "an East Anglian town". They were banned too from commenting on the weather conditions but it was felt that the heavy rain, which kept people indoors, was responsible for the complete absence of casualties when a stick of high explosives and incendiaries fell in Huntingdon Road just beside Shire Hall on September 29th. Extensive damage was caused to telephone wires but there was no traffic in the road at the time or they could not have escaped.

Following each raid came the repairs - replacing damaged tiles and cracked glass, with the WVS on the scene to supply refreshment and neighbours rallying around to hear of narrow escapes - how the children had slept through it all, though bombs fell only feet away.

But not all the damage was caused by enemy action. In February three old ladies were killed instantly when a returning RAF bomber crashed on to houses in Histon Road. Damage to morale was coming from Lord Haw Haw broadcasting from Germany whose claims that

every house in every village and hamlet in the Isle of Ely were to be smashed as a punishment for receiving evacuated Jews were mentioned as one factor in another court case.

The Mayor's wrath however was aimed at a Glisson Road resident who had allowed a light to show from an upstairs window whilst a raid was actually taking place. The offender, himself a warden, had gone to his post when the bombs started falling, unaware of the defective blackout. After deliberation the Mayor decided not to impose a prison sentence but fined him £5 - the equivalent of two weeks wages for a farm worker.

Stories from a year – 1942, by Mike Petty

The news of the fall of the impregnable naval base and fortress at Singapore broke in the Cambridge area a few days after its capitulation. Official spokesmen revealed that amongst the forces that had put up a magnificent fight against the invading Japanese were members of the Cambridgeshire Regiment. It was known that the Governor, Sir Shenton Thomas, son of a former vicar of St Barnabas church, had been interned.

It was not known what had happened to the local soldiers. "It may be some time before details of a personal nature are received ... it is, regrettable and trying as it may be, just a matter of waiting with as much patience as possible."

First news arrived in March. It was heartbreakingly brief - a mere statement that four named officers were posted as "missing"; "it is hoped that he is safe although he may be a prisoner of war". Next week came more names to add to the missing list - and more photographs in the local paper. There was however more positive news for one family - a cable from Lieut Harradine to say that he had reached safety after an adventurous journey of 24 days - but no indication of where the cable had originated. By 27th March the Cambridge Independent Press was having to devote two pages to photographs of familiar faces whose status was unknown. By the 9th of April there were so many to record that the paper did not have space for them all and restricted itself to the village men - Bolton and Davies, Rouse and Brown, Brand and Brown ... The town lads were however being featured in the Cambridge Daily News as space permitted.

There was still no news by May when relatives met at the Guildhall to hear the Founder of the British Prisoners of War Books and Games Fund. So far one-third of a million books had been sent out and libraries equipped in every Prisoner of War camp in Germany, Italy, Occupied France and North Africa. But for most in her audience all that was too near - their thoughts were further East.

Meanwhile life went on. During the hardship of the time farmers tried to hide petrol in pigsties, conscientious objectors tried to dodge the conditions of their registration. There were threats of a water shortage - to save coal at the pumping station and Herbert Morrison - Minister of Home Security - called for a "clean and decisive victory" when addressing a meeting of students at that same Guildhall. There were worries of invasion, rumours of air raids, and tales of daring from returning heroes.

Then in Mid May came a letter from Singapore. It said there were only light casualties - but had been written before the capitulation from a ship somewhere between Singapore and Sumatra. A Malayan civil servant supplied news of Sir Shenton, being with him at Government House during the Japanese bombardment. He was concerned about the health of his wife who developed dysentery on the very day the enemy landed. Nevertheless he was awaiting his future with great courage and dignity.

Weeks passed with only negative news until a Bourn lady received a letter from a business friend with Far East connections. "All prisoners of war and internees in Singapore are being well treated, have their freedom on the island and are being well fed, and can play games". Bombs hit the Union society and shattered houses and lives, German-born students were interned as aliens, the King toured Burwell fen - and then in October came news. 1100 postcards had arrived by ship in Lourenzo Marques addressed to relatives of men who had been in Singapore, the War office were trying to contact the families involved. Later Lord Haw Haw had news on his German radio broadcast - how could he know what we did not - or was it just his usual propaganda.

In December came the first official lists of Prisoners of War in Japanese hands - just name, rank and number - but seen as heartening news for some local families at the end of a year of waiting. At the same time news was breaking about the treatment of Jews in German extermination camps - thank goodness our men were elsewhere ..._

Stories from a year – 1943, by Mike Petty

Village life did not stop just because there was a war on. The whist drives and dances, Women's Institutes and Parish councils continued as ever. But there were changes.

Conington church had been tastefully decorated for Christmas 1942 - sadly they could not ring the church bells before Holy Communion; nor could Swavesey sound the traditional peal between 5 and 6 on Christmas Morning - indeed the service had to transfer to the Vicarage because of the lighting restrictions - but they did ring out at midday. If anybody thought that this meant invasion was imminent then it was too bad.

At that time of Good Will it was appropriate that Elsworth's carol-singing total of £10 should go to the Prisoner of War fund, Swavesey dance to the "Crazy Crochets" raise money for the "Comforts Fund" and Lolworth's waste paper and rags salvage should go mainly to the Red Cross - although 10/- was invested in savings stamps for the boys who had collected it.

As 1943 proceeded there was news of local lads - home on leave - Rev W.H. Hills of Fen Drayton who celebrated Communion whilst back in the parish, meeting in the desert, winning medals - a DFM for pilot-officer Wilkerson of Swavesey - or dying for their country - sergeant-pilot Kendrick of Elsworth whose funeral in April was attended by his fellow officers.

The uncertainty after the fall of Singapore was slowly being resolved - a telegram from Tokyo told a mother that amongst those interned in Changi camp was her daughter. Shortly afterwards a son wrote "Dear mother and dad. I am safe and well ... please remember me to all at home". The following week's lecture to Elsworth Women's Institute became especially interesting for it was entitled "Japan before the war"

Wings for Victory week saw parishes raising morale as well as money. Swavesey was set a target of £4,000. They organised a parade headed by the Home Guard which ended on the Recreation Group with a display of their weapons, a dance including the sale of lemons given by a Commando lately returned from Tunisia; the whist drive was disappointing, the fancy dress parade and games better, a pin could be stuck in Hitler - people queuing to be blindfolded and to try to find the most painful place - and the final total came to £6,645. Some of it would go to supply additional large rubber dinghies suitable for a four-engined bomber like the one they'd bought earlier in the year

But there were particular problems during war. Swavesey had to decide where to station the National Fire Service engine - the answer on the site of the old engine house and the adjoining

parish pound - but was it worth cleaning out the pond to provide a source of water should the engine be needed. Certainly the Home Guard were doing a great job but they were also cluttering up the village with the materials they'd wanted as obstructions but never actually used

All this and the weddings, the house sales - a thatched cottage for £620, the pig club meetings and retiring organists, were grist to the mill for Cyril Vincent. Forced by ill health to give up his work in London and settle in Swavesey he became the local reporter for the Cambridge Independent Press in 1896. His paragraphs on Lolworth, Conington and the rest were carefully filed and it was his proud boast that he could turn up any item at will. They are now housed in the Cambridgeshire Collection.

Perhaps his biggest headline came in December 1943. It was the story of the death of one of the newspapers' most valued contributors, a man who had reported village life for nearly 50 years - C.R. Vincent himself._

Stories from a year - 1944

By the 2nd of June 1944 the military preparations for the invasion of Europe were ready to roll. The troops were massed along the South coast waiting for the right conditions for the attack. Despite all the careful planning however surprise was essential. The Germans must be given no hint of what was about to happen

On the 2nd of June 1944 in Cambridge another military exercise was being put into operation. Whereas throughout the war the presence of American servicemen had been hushed up now it was being trumpeted. Though now it was the dead who were attracting the publicity with the dedication of the American Military Cemetery at Madingley.

Many of those commemorated had been lost whilst delivering bombs to Germany - always a hazardous undertaking - as four railwaymen were about to prove on that same day, 2nd June 1944.

It was at fifteen minutes past midnight that Driver Benjamin Gimbert and Fireman James Nightall set off from March marshalling yards with a consignment of fifty-one wagons full of bombs and detonators. Their journey proceeded without incident through Ely and Barway and on towards Soham at a steady 20 mph.

That night the signalman on duty at Soham box was "Sailor" Frank Bridges. He heard the engine whistle and noticed it stop briefly just outside the station. As he looked along the track he could see that what should have been a blacked-out train was in fact a very bright one. He came down on to the platform to offer assistance.

The whistle had been to alert Guard Clarke of an unscheduled stop. He saw the flames 51 ammunition wagons in front of him but walked towards the fire. He walked the length of three wagons forwards, within seconds he found himself thrown the length of six wagons back.

Gimbert had noticed the leading wagon with its forty 500-lb bombs was ablaze and knew that something had to be done. The easiest thing would have been to stop and run but that was not his way. Instead he stopped and Fireman Nightall ran - back to the blazing bomb load. He disconnected that one wagon from the other fifty and rejoined his driver on the footplate. Together they steamed through the station pulling the burning load clear.

Soham citizens slept soundly until their windows shattered and their beds shook as five tons of high explosives detonated and a crater fifteen feet deep and sixty-six feet wide appeared where once their station had stood. Those first on the scene found the twisted machinery, the shattered signal box and the wrecked bodies of Fireman Nightall and Signaller Bridges. They also found the heroic Driver Gimbert and fifty other fully-loaded ammunition wagons amazingly still intact.

American troops were quickly on the scene, the craters were filled and the line reopened to munitions trains. But German newspapers reported the explosions demonstrating their knowledge of every little incident. Meanwhile Somewhere Else in England many other heroes were waiting for the right conditions - A-day, B-day, C-day ... D-Day_

Stories from a year: 1945, by Mike Petty

The cablegram read "Philip fit and well, Bangkok. Reply c/o Swiss Consulate". It had been handed in at Bangkok on August 27th 1945 and meant that Captain W.P.O. Unwin of Histon, a member of the Cambridgeshire Regiment who, like so many others, had been captured at the fall of Singapore in February 1942 was now free and would soon be making the long sea voyage home. Soon came other news 35,000 prisoners had been released on Singapore Island alone, others were in camps inland, still more in Saigon ... For some it was tremendous news in what had been a long, hard year

By 1945 people had become heartily sick of the war and weary of shortages of every kind toilet rolls were virtually unobtainable, you took one with you when you went visiting. Rationing was more severe than ever. On the War Front the success of D Day in the previous June had been followed by the liberation of Paris and the long slog across country; in January HMS Walpole, the destroyer 'adopted' by the people of Ely, was sunk off the Dutch coast with the loss of two of her crew & the British Army crossed the Rhine, Mussolini was killed by Italian partisans and the German army in Italy surrendered; the Russians reached Berlin. Hitler committed suicide on April 30th and Germany capitulated on May 7th

Widespread celebrations greeted VE Day; on May 8th several thousand students assembled in Cambridge Market Square, singing, dancing and cheering; a waste paper dump in St Mary's Passage became a bonfire. Next day there was dancing in the streets, the official proclamations, long queues for tea shops and restaurants & a torchlight procession to Midsummer Common where there was another bonfire. An effigy of Hitler was burnt at Littleport, Sutton church was floodlit, Union Jacks and streamers decorated the Stretham streets.

The statue of Oliver Cromwell at St Ives was decorated with a dustbin lid; at Ramsey a chair was fixed to the church steeple, at Hartford children roasted potatoes in the hot ashes of a bonfire, and a WAAF climbed the war memorial at Huntingdon to put a cigarette in the statue's lips. At St Neots the town echoed to the sound of hammering as men festooned the streets with flags, and two American Military Policemen with white helmets and white spats patrolled the town before the carnival got under way

But amongst all the happy headlines were the usual sad stories a Needingworth family had learned of the death of their son and news came in from Belsen Concentration Camp where a St Ives man was helping tend the victims "They are packed in huts like sardines, and they do everything in the huts because they are too weak to move; some we found sleeping on top of dead bodies the stench is terrible ... the camp stretches over acres and acres, it has been the training place for the SS troops so you can tell how the patients have been treated ..." little comfort for those whose sons were in camps in the Far East.

Evacuee children, some of whom had been with their foster families since the start of the war, were taken to local stations, where foster parents bade them a sad and tearful farewell before returning to homes that were now empty and quiet. The last Parades for the Special Police, Civil Defence and Fire Guard Services were held on Parker's Piece in June, and the 8th US Army Air Force was awarded the Honorary Freedom of Cambridge in July.

But still the Japanese were battling on and the members of the Cambridgeshire Regiment were enduring heaven knows what. August 6th saw an Atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima, three days later another destroyed Nagasaki. On August 11th Japan surrendered; three weeks later came the telegram to the Histon home

As the Prisoners from the Far East returned so civic receptions were held to welcome them home. The local politicians talked about homes for heroes, somebody noticed activity that might mean the glass was about to be restored to the windows at Kings College chapel. The Post Office experienced a bumper rush at Christmas but throughout the county hundreds waited for a letter just a card carrying happy news from foreign parts that never came

compiled 3rd Oct 1988

Stories from a year - 1946

Peace was still coming - the men of the Cambridgeshire Regiment were back from the Far East and in February they gathered at Ely cathedral for a stirring service of thanksgiving and memorial - they had chosen that particular Sunday - it was just 4 years ago that their relations in England had learned the tragic news of their men's capture in Singapore. In March their drums followed them - the drums which carried their Regimental battle honours but been lost in the fall of Singapore had been discovered by a Dullingham woman working for the Red Cross whilst picnicking - they arrived at Cambridge station and were displayed in Joshua Taylor's windows

Padre J.N. Duckworth told a meeting of the Cambridge Royart Club of the grim conditions the Cambridgeshire men had experienced as prisoners of the Japanese ... of the inspiring spirit and morale under the most terrible conditions. In August 1944 he had been in the "valley of the shadow of death", 450 miles long through which they were constructing the Burma-Thailand railway, his audience were horrified to hear of the conditions and of the state of the men suffering ulcers, malaria, beri beri and dysentery. It had been August 13th 1945 when his particular camp had heard on their small Japanese radio of the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima, four days later it was over - "there was no flag waving or anything like that, just a long sigh of relief".

There were housing problems: squatters taking over army Nissen Huts in Hills Road and the Hundred Houses society announced plans for a development of 200 houses to be called the Scotland Farm Estate in Chesterton but South Cambridgeshire Rural district council were boycotting prefabs - they had been waiting 12-18 months for them, had not got any and did not look like getting any - anyway they were getting more expensive - prices had gone up from £600 to £1200. But they were worth the wait according to housewives "It was just marvellous in prefabland - the kind of home I always wanted

RATIONING WAS REINTRODUCED and the Ministry of food introduced a new recipe for Squirrel pie. There were swoops on black marketeers but problems over eggs in Comberton - with a court case involving a 42 year old wife throwing 80 eggs at her 70 year old husband

But there were problems on local farms: county agricultural wages board proposed to increase rate for women workers to 50/- for a 48 hour week - but they could not agree to the claim for a 90/- minimum wage for men

President of the National Union of Agricultural Workers told a Cottenham Labour Party fete what should be done - "there are Italian and German prisoners working on our farms - it is time they were returned to their own countries to work the land there - British farms should have British labour

Polish immigrants were in the news: 6,000 Poles of General Anders army were due in this country shortly with another 12,000 every other week until the army of 100,000 had been absorbed - Cambridge Trades Council were not in favour - though they were told by Major Symonds that they should not forget what the Poles had done for us during the war - 9 out of 10 had fought on our side, a large number were pilots in the Battle of Britain

Not all the foreigners were unwelcome: A Steeple Morden man charged as co-respondent an Italian prisoner of war of adultery - he'd been based at their bungalow between July 1943 and July 1944 and in that November his wife had presented him with a child that looked more like the lodger than the husband

DIVORCE rates soared ... a Cambridge man claimed he was "unlucky in the women he'd married" - a bad run of luck - he'd divorced his first wife, remarried and then made two bigamous marriages just to compound the felony.

The first of some 10,000 GI BRIDES left for America – and Lady Bragg took to the air in January as the first passenger on the reopening of Marshall's civil flying school after the war- it would be building up a fleet of aircraft for air charter and air taxi work

Aneurin Bevan announced plans for a NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE but Addenbrooke's Hospital managers saw it as a threat - it would destroy the local interest, enterprise and pride in the hospital service and set up a soulless state monopoly

Other plans were also being laid and in Cambridge in October the town came to a standstill. The Market Hill was full, windows and roofs packed with spectators as the sound of the drums heralded the arrival of a parade which had left from Parker's Piece and marched proudly along Regent Street and Petty Cury - a route lined with townspeople who watched the passing columns in a quiet, dignified way - no cheering, no applause, just respectful silence.

The Honorary Freedom of the Borough was bestowed on the Cambridgeshire Regiment in recognition of its service in the South African War, for its superb professionalism during the fighting in Flanders and for its valiant fight in the Far East.

That fight had not ended with the last shots fired in the defence of Singapore - in fact the courage that was now being recognised was the years of captivity that followed. In prison camps scattered all over the Far East they had suffered every hardship, lack of food, disease, cruelty, indignities and utter isolation. Among many ordeals the building of the railway in the grim jungles of Siam was singled out by the Mayor for especial mention.

Now there was flag waving - and a particular flag had place of honour from the Guildhall flagpole - the blue flag of the 1st Battalion of the Cambridgeshire Regiment that had somehow been kept hidden from their captives during the long years of captivity.

As the procession wended its way down Petty Cury it was the drums that marked their progress. And amongst the drums were some emblazoned with the Regiment's honours won

in earlier wars but lost in the fall of Singapore. Amazingly they had been found by a Dullingham girl, Mary Taylor during her work with the Red Cross and shipped back to Cambridge.

In October 1946 they led the old men of the First War and prematurely old boys from the Second to the Guildhall to receive the Freedom they had fought to preserve.

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Stories from a year – 1946, by Mike Petty

As 1946 drew to its close the newspaper headlines reflected the principal issues : "A NEW TOWN FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE" - it would be welcomed said Cambridge councillors; "BOUNDARY QUESTION AND CLAIMS OF SUFFOLK" - Suffolk seek to take over the villages of Chippenham and Snailwell in response to Cambridgeshire's claim to take in Newmarket; "FLOOD PROTECTION SCHEME" - details of finance still had to be finalised; "RAILWAY STATION SCHEME" - proposed for Cambridge as part of large improvement programme, including electrification. But this was 1946 and the details below the headlines were different from those currently occupying local politicians.

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That fight had not ended with the last shots fired in the defence of Singapore - in fact the courage that was now being recognised was the 3½ years of captivity that followed. In prison camps scattered all over the Far East they had suffered every hardship, lack of food, disease, cruelty, indignities and utter isolation. Among many ordeals the building of the railway in the grim jungles of Siam was singled out by the Mayor for especial mention.

The full extent of their sufferings was being to be revealed. Padre J.N. Duckworth had told members of Cambridge Rotary of the inspiring spirit and morale under the most terrible conditions. In August 1944 he had been in the "valley of the shadow of death", 450 miles long through which they were constructing the Burma-Thailand railway, his audience were horrified to hear of the conditions and of the state of the men suffering ulcers, malaria, beri beri and dysentery. It had been August 13th 1945 when his particular camp had heard on their small Japanese radio of the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima, four days later it was over - "there was no flag waving or anything like that, just a long sigh of relief".

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Forty three years later plans for new towns, railways and boundaries are set aside whilst Mayors once more pay homage to lads who never aged and old men who can never forget._
compiled 20.11.1989

Stories of flood 1937 & 1947 by Mike Petty 13.3.1997

The High spring tides coincide with heavy rain.

The great sluice at Denver cannot be opened to allow the rivers to empty into the sea and more and more water drains into the fenland river system. The high river banks are full to the brim and are crumbling and dissolving in the water just as sugar dissolves in tea. Slips occur, the bank slides a bit, but as it threatens to break men rush to bolster it up with clay and sandbags.

The banks themselves are already two feet higher because of these lines of sacks but still the water seeps through and strong winds blow sheets of water out from the river and down into the adjoining fen fen that is itself a sea of mud comparable with the mud of Flanders. "The way feet sink in with a dull sucking noise reminds me of the time when we moved into Passchendale during the war".

The sodden fen means that lorries cannot get near to bring bags potato bags, sandbags any sort of bag and the sodden land itself is unsuitable for filling them. 10,000 bags have been laid since yesterday morning and the water is seeping through at the places they placed the bags yesterday afternoon

The men are willing but almost at the end of their tether. Most are now so tired that if some really terrible disaster came along they would hardly be any use at all. Throughout the fen, along the top of river and drain every available man hundreds of men, wet and weary, watch the water in the river while even more rain penetrates their clothing and the incessant cold wind chills them even more.

There is talk of calling in the army and at Ely a bugler is standing by to sound a "fall in" for volunteers in the event of a major burst. The town criers at Haddenham and Swavesey are appealing for extra men to go to the aid of Willingham, just one of the danger points. Barway and Lt Thetford have breached and the main A10 is cut by flooding near Stretham the car loads of undergraduates flocking to help must find another way on to the Isle of Ely.

The BBC broadcasts flood warnings urging people to alert their neighbours without wireless sets to listen for the church bells which will announce the time has come for evacuation.

For many families it is already too later. Their land is under water, their homes are flooded. "We fenland folk can stand a lot. The water has got to be coming over the doorstep before we begin to flit. A horseman tells me that the water has reached his front door... his wife is sweeping it away with a broom".

It is the worst flood for many years worse than 1928, worse than last year. It is March 1937. "We've got out of scrapes before, and we'll get out of this one" says a fen farmer. He is right. The floods of March 1937 are now largely forgotten. They were only a minor dampness compared to the devastation that was to follow ten years later.

1947: The High spring tides coincide with a sudden thaw of the heavy snow. The great sluice at Denver cannot be opened to allow the rivers to empty into the sea and more and more water drains into the fenland river system.

The high river banks are full to the brim and are crumbling and dissolving in the water just as sugar dissolves in tea. Slips occur, the bank slides a bit, but as it threatens to break men rush to bolster it up with clay and sandbags ... it's the same old story, March 1937 over again but this time worse.

On March 16th 1947 hurricane force winds swept sheets of water over the bank tops and sent the patrolling men scurrying for shelter. Roads were blocked by fallen trees, telephones lines blown down and 190 people evacuated from the Prickwillow area as flooding threatened. But it was March 17th when the main breaches occurred. One was at Lt Thetford which swamped the main railway line and spread south to close the Wicken road and threaten the main A10 at Stretham Ferry. The other was way out in the fen near Earith where a 50 yard gap had been torn in the river bank and properties at Over and Willingham were flooded, the water flowing east until it was checked by the main Old West river bank alongside which runs the Earith to Willingham road

For a while this held back the flood but as the water level increased so the very bank itself was overtopped and water began to trickle into Hill Row fen. A wholesale evacuation started, first the tools of their trade farm implements and livestock, then furniture and effects. Behind them came a steady stream of water driving rabbits and rats ahead of it. By nightfall on the 18th much of what in the morning had been fertile fen was a mass of grey water. Houses, farm buildings and stacks stood deserted and marooned whilst families found shelter where they could. Elsewhere the battle continued.

For five days water poured unchecked through the broken bank and rose higher and higher, brick by brick, up the flooded houses. Then on the 24th "Operation Neptune" finally sealed the breach by constructing a steel wall of amphibious vehicles around it and allowing more orthodox repair work to start. Hundreds of pumps were brought in to suck the water off the land and throw it back into the rivers.

As the floods went down and families returned to their shattered homes they were horrified by the sights that confronted them. Ruined shells of houses, stinking mud impregnated walls, scratches on the windowsills where rats had scabbled to keep above the water. Undeterred they replanted their fields, rebuilt their houses and eventually when the walls had finally dried out made them homes again.

Since then new rivers have been cut, the banks have been strengthened but should nature once more combine wind, waves and water then danger will once more threaten. The fenman can never be complacent, the threat is never ending

Stories from a year - 1948

In Soham in 1948 the talk was of the two mills, one was now rising from the ashes and would be good for the village whilst the other was good for nothing.

It had been in July 1945 that fire had gutted the fine, modern roller mill owned by Messrs Clark and Butcher. One of the oldest and best-known firms in East Anglia, they specialised in making biscuit flour and indeed had won medals for their product. Its destruction was a serious setback but now, three years later the firm was back in production and corn was once more arriving by road and rail.

By contrast no corn arrived at the other mill in Soham mere. It had been built by Hunts, the Soham millwrights, in 1867 at a cost of £1,000, for two brothers. One was tall and stout and

of uncertain temper, while the other was short and thin and very good natured. The tall brother died aged 75 but when the short brother was ninety Mr Clark, who owned the roller mills, met him in the street. "Well, John," he said, "if you live to be one hundred I'll give you half a crown a week". The old man lived to be 107!

His mill was one of the thousands used for draining the fens. As the wind blew and the sails turned so the power was converted to drive a large wooden wheel that would reach down into the fenland dykes and scoop the water up and over the high river banks into the river.

When the fens were drained and the water extracted from the peat soil so the level of the land shrank, leaving the bed of the river higher than the adjacent fields. High banks had now to be constructed to keep the water in and some method found to lift the water from the ditches and throw it up into the river. Hence the need for these wind engines which grew up throughout the area.

Yet as the land dried more so it shrank further. One windmill could no longer lift the water high enough. So a second was built alongside the first to raise the water part way - and sometimes another beside that. Yet they were all dependent on the wind. If there was no breeze to turn the sails then the mill would not pump; if the breeze turned into a gale then it might turn the sails too quickly, causing friction that could set it on fire, or even blow the mill off its base and send it walking across the fen.

New technology came to the drainers' aid with the advent of the great steam pumps that could work whenever needed and could move far more water than the old-fashioned windmill. In turn steam was phased out by diesel and so by 1948, just a year after the great floods, the ramshackled old mill was no further use to anybody.

The County Council had been busily negotiating the transfer of their drainage powers throughout 1948 and by May had come to the decision that the only answer lay in demolition. Enthusiasts protested at the loss of this rare survival of a drainage mill but to no avail - it was just too dangerous.

So the demolition men moved in to pull it over with a tractor. They failed. Undaunted they returned with gunpowder. They failed. So in the end eight charges of gelignite had to be used to topple the "dangerous" structure. Ironically just eight years later another Hunt's mill, much younger, much less impressive and in a much worse state, was re-built and erected just next door, at Wicken Fen, where it is lauded as the last of the fenland wind drainage mills._

Stories from a year - 1949

In January 1949 motorists at Trumpington experienced a warm glow, the shadows that had been blighting their lives disappeared - at least in part - when sodium lighting was introduced as an experiment on the stretch of road between Brooklands Avenue and Bentley Road.

Twelve 140 watt bulbs dramatically improved their night-time visibility providing six times more light than the old fittings and at cheaper cost. By 1952 the Council had decided to install 400 of the new lights in a crash programme and the following year Cambridge could boast that it was one of the first cities in the country to be lit entirely by sodium.

Sometimes brighter lights caused dangers - in 1911 complaints had been aired that the new gas lights on Barnwell Bridge were too powerful and were dazzling motorists. Generally however they were appreciated.

New lights were welcomed in one village: "The traffic through Sawston has increased considerably of late years" commented the Cambridge Chronicle. "The one continuous street,

in the bends and narrow parts, where the inhabitants are their thickest, has been dangerous to drive through during the dark -evenings of winter" - a common statement, except that it was written in November 1882 - 106 years ago.

It was 1836 when the streets of Ely were lighted with coal-gas for the first time; the lamps were "well-made and placed upon elegant painted cast-iron pillars" and the inhabitants well-pleased with the result. Swavesey had followed suit in February 1886 with Willingham limping behind in 1891, whilst at Fulbourn in January 1893 a public supper was held at the Six Bells Inn to celebrate the completion of the lighting of their village by oil lamps following a successful experiment the previous year. The parish debates all took much time.

In 1893 Cherry Hinton were anxiously scanning the various Acts of Parliament to see which one was best suited to their circumstances. Such had been the recent expansion that unless they were careful the old part of the village would end up paying for the lighting of the newly developed Rock and Cavendish estates. They were also debating the type of light - oil or gas - or perhaps they should form their own company to generate electricity, at a cost of about £4,000.

It was a familiar debate for Cambridge where in 1757 people were quite convinced that better lighting would increase fights between groups who now groped their way past each other unrecognised in the dark. However an Act of Parliament of 1788 empowered the better lighting of the town, new lamps were installed and lit for the first time on a September evening that year. Oil lamps gave way to gas and in 1840 a contract was signed with the Cambridge Gas Light Company for the installation of 350 lamps. The first lamp post was installed outside the Newmarket Road works and others followed throughout the central area.

The lamp posts themselves were often the subject of motor accidents or high-spirits, with inebriated undergraduates often shinning up them to light their cigarettes from the gas flame. During rag-time it became the norm to put out the light - the answer to this was to wrap the posts in greasy rags to prevent people climbing them - though it was soon realised that such greasy rags could easily be set alight - a much better sport! During both World Wars the lights were extinguished and a reflective strip painted on the posts to prevent people walking into them in the black out. However it was on VJ night in 1945 that the most prominent street light became a casualty of the celebrations. The large light on Parker's Piece had been erected in 1894 at a cost of £39 and when repaired and redesigned in 1946 became the first fluorescent light in the country. It was repainted in 1973 and now adds a touch of brightness to the Cambridge scene by both day and night.

Stories from a year - 1950

Cambridge was quite used to bangs in November - but usually Guy Fawkes had been celebrated and forgotten at the beginning of the month. In 1950 the bangs - "explosions" said the paper - came at the end. Newspaper reporters scurried round to find the cause. Was it yet another fire at the Cavendish Laboratory - there had been two within eight months earlier in the year, or were the Civil defenders rehearsing their plans to see how the town would cope in the event of attack.

The Laboratories still stood intact, there was no broken glass in college courts yet Cambridge had undergone a radical transformation. Sixteen giant elm trees each older than the buildings they framed had been dynamited along the Backs. It was just the latest stage in the removal of the mature trees in that area.

The Avenue at Trinity College had been removed in 1948; that at St Johns was to follow in 1951. Elms have been the victim of many attacks. As early as 1922 those lining Brooklands Avenue were being described as dangerous; 180 had been planted in about 1850 but disease

was taking its toll. By 1937 50 had been destroyed, by 1940 the disease was so endemic that there was no point in planting new. In 1950 only 92 of the trees remained and they were coming down at the rate of between one and five a year. Parker's Piece trees were dangerous by 1962, a decade before the notorious outbreak of Dutch Elm Disease which is still so lamented and which led to the removal of a particularly rare specimen from the corner of Drummer Street in 1978.

Trees have a finite life. In 1912 the Lombardy Poplar at Hyde Park corner originally planted by Julian Skrine in the garden of his house Lensfield was cut down and with it went part of old Cambridge. It had been under threat before: in 1864 when the Improvement Commissioners had debated alterations on the corner, in 1888 when the new Catholic Church was being planned; in 1901 underground toilets had been constructed beneath its branches but now it was victim to the ravages of time.

In 1894 however perfectly good trees were being uprooted in Victoria Avenue to benefit farmers. The Royal Agricultural Show was to be held on Midsummer Common and people feared that the rows of trees newly planted to soften the impact of the great new roadway carved across the common to carry traffic to and from the new Victoria Bridge would be damaged. So they were dug up, to be replanted in Chesterton and replaced once the Show had departed.

New trees have often been planted for special occasion. In 1897 limes along Chesterton Road were seen as one way of celebrating Queen Victoria's Jubilee. The willow population along the River Cam will be greatly enhanced to commemorate the centenary of the Cambridge Evening News in 1988

Despite the replacement programme along the Backs themselves it will be generations before residents and visitors will once more witness the magnificent trees most of which vanished, unrecorded and unremarked - except when the saw and axe have given way to more dramatic methods of felling.

Stories from a year - 1951

Slaughter House Lane was just inside the Kings Ditch - the ancient trench that had been dug around Cambridge to act as a defence, linking the river in the north to the river in the west. The name indicates the chief occupation of the area and the offal and waste from the slaughtered animals found a ready home at the bottom of the ditch, contributing to the stench and smell that pervaded the area.

Later the site became known as Hog Hill and once more animals were in evidence - but this time live animals for sale from the Beast Market. It was this site that was chosen for the Corn Exchange which opened in 1842.

Seven years later the Market Hill area was devastated by a fire and when the ashes had cooled the debate began on how best to make use of this new opportunity to redevelop the commercial centre of the town. The present square market is one result of the deliberation.

A second consequence was more slowly realised and necessitated much debate, argument, revision of plans and recourse to the House of Lords. Eventually however in 1876 a New Corn Exchange was opened right beside the Old.

The question as to what was to be done with the Old building occupied many minds. For a while it was used as an indoor market - the Cambridge Arcade - but perhaps it was too far from the mainstream of shopping and it closed in 1884.

For a while the building stood empty until Ernie Hayward, an enterprising local concert promoter, opened it as a variety music hall and enjoyed considerable success. The long frost between December 1894 and March 1895 was its downfall.

The cold weather prompted another enterprising businessman, Mr Bartholomew, to install floodlights so people could skate on a specially flooded area of Grantchester Meadows through the hours of darkness. This combination of a popular pastime and the novelty of floodlighting caught the imagination of those patrons who ought to have been flocking into the Arcade Music Hall. Even the prospect of a Marie Lloyd concert was insufficient attraction and the theatre closed shortly before the thaw came.

From 1895 to 1914 the Old Corn Exchange was used as a cycle repair shop, benefiting from its position adjacent to the Downing Street and New Museums laboratories whose students might learn the high-technology physics but preferred to let others tend to their low-technology bicycles. Subsequently the motorist was also catered for - just one of the many garages which have now disappeared from central Cambridge.

Then in January 1951 came demolition - the site was more useful than the old, listed, building - for car parking. Now in January 1989 work is supposed to start on the construction of a new Hotel complex, its deep foundations stretching into and below the old Kings Ditch, disturbing the remains - and quite probably the smell - of the animals dumped there hundreds of years ago.

Stories from a year - 1952

A dirty and neglected boy died of typhus fever in Abbey Street. There was nothing remarkable in that - it was all too common in that disgraceful area of Barnwell in the earliest years of Queen Victoria's reign. His father, a glazier, was perpetually drunk. But now he had repented of his sinful ways - "Oh, sir, there was no resisting the prayers and entreaties of that dying boy. He made me ashamed of myself, and I could not help reading the chapters which he had marked in his Bible for my own and his mother's benefit ... "

The student preacher loved to tell the story of the successful missionary work undertaken by himself and his college friends. They had ventured into the mean back streets of Barnwell to knock on doors and try to entice the children to God.

They found some response. "Women came to their doors to see so strange a sight as gownsmen visiting their homes on an errand of mercy ... some parents, acting upon the principle that gownsmen might be easily ... fleeced, wanted to know what they would be paid if the children were sent".

The idea of establishing a Sunday School for such an area was first discussed in 1827. They were granted the use of the Friends Meeting House and so the "Jesus Lane Sunday School" came into being.

On that first Sunday the room was packed with 220 children. "I shall not readily forget the shouting and uproar which saluted our ears on entering the building ... there never was gathered together such a set on unruly, boisterous, dirty, ragged children".

The initial issue of tickets for regular attendance was discontinued when it was discovered that similar designs were also distributed elsewhere and were bartered between children to be redeemed at Jesus Lane where twelve could be converted into a penny.

Fortified by their progress in spreading the word of God into a godless community the Sunday School went from strength to strength. It outgrew its original home and moved to King Street in 1833, but kept the old name.

Much remained to be done. A newspaper correspondent in 1853 reported "The abodes are cheerless, squalid; their occupants eye you with a restless, wistful glance ... all is poverty and barren dreariness ..." A clergyman recalled "Devil's Row" a "wretched heaven-forsaken haunt of men ... the focus of villany, the receptacle of dishonest spoil, the refuge of the petty thief and the fully developed scoundrel".

In 1865 the Jesus Lane Sunday School moved to Paradise Street and new buildings. Here for 70 years it remained a great institution with 5-600 children on the books and with many of its teachers going on to positions of distinction in Church and State. The Great War dealt a blow from which it never recovered. In 1936 the building was sold to the Boy Scouts Association and St Radegund's Hall erected to serve the new housing estates east of the railway

In August 1952 the Jesus Lane Sunday School finally closed after 120 years of devoted work, its building used for the new Church of St Stephen, its funds to support the work with youth now undertaken in every parish._

Stories from a year -1953

Early in January 1953 the Cambridge Daily News carried a notice of the death of Herbert Charles Banham, Alderman of the city and founder of the boat-building firm that carried his name. He had been in poor health for some time.

His father had been a boot and shoe dealer and Herbert took over that business on his father's death. But his heart was in boats and not boots. He was to do more to popularise motor-boating in Cambridge than anybody else, with thousands using his large passenger boats such as the Viscountess Bury and others discovering the fenland waterways in his feller of self-drive day boats and hire cruisers.

It was in 1906 that he started his boat-building activities at Riverside and by 1914 had a small fleet of boats; he had developed a boat building business and during the Great War built launches for the Russian navy.

When the war ended he bought a racing rowing boat business at Victoria Bridge and as the years passed his expertise in such boats became recognised with his firm constructing many of the eights used by University and college crews.

In the early days the rowing boats often competed for river space with the working boats - the various tugs that brought lines of barges into Cambridge, vessels like the Nancy and the Cutter, the first steam tug to work the Cam. This was owned and operated by the Dant family, who also operated the chain ferry at the Cutter Inn, Chesterton. When the barge trade declined in the 1890s the family auctioned the business and the land they owned became Banhams Boat Yard in 1927.

That year Herbert tried to revive the commercial trade on the river by running a large steel deisel-diven barge which he named 'Nancy II' to carry sugar from Kings Lynn for the Chivers factory at Histon. The enterprise proved unsuccessful not least because the boat was rather too large and had some difficulty both in passing through the locks on the Cam and in the tidal section of the river Ouse below Denver where it was found that when there was sufficient tide to float her clear of the bottom she was often unable to squeeze under the bridges.

Fortunately his hire craft were more profitable and during the Second War he supplied the Admiralty with whalers and high speed motor craft. He also operated at his own expense a fire float for the Auxiliary Fire Service, adapting one of his hire craft.. Postwar his business boomed. His boats were graphically described in the brochures the firm produced to entice holiday makers on to the fenland waterways and the company issued its own charts.

They were waters Banham knew well for he was a founder-member of the Cambridge Motor Boat Club and served as Vice-Commodore for 30 years before being elected Commodore in 1952. This was not the only election he won for in 1939 he began to represent East Chesterton on the borough council; ten years later his wife Cora took over whilst Herbert became an Alderman. The river which was his business and his hobby also became his duty not only as a Conservator of the Cam and member of the Sewage disposal committee but also serving on the committees of the Great Ouse River and Inland Waterways Boards.

In 1961 the firm he founded became part of the Pye Group and as work on the Elizabeth Bridge proceeded the old site had to be vacated, though the old chain ferry continued to ply across the river carrying engineers from one bank to the other. In 1973 Banhams executives bought back the boat hire and chandlery side of the business but in 1976 the firm moved its business to Ely. Attempts to move back during the 1980s were frustrated, they sold the 'Viscountess Bury', flagship of their fleet, and another chapter in Cambridge history closed._

Stories from a year - 1954

Many of the old established colleges have extensive cellars of fine wine but such luxuries might be thought low on the scale of a new foundation. Yet one of the first achievements of the new students of New Hall was to win a firkin of ale to supplement the fare supplied by the college. This they achieved by throwing themselves fully into the Poppy Day Rag activities and raising the highest total per head of any college.

October 1954 saw the arrival of 16 women students, selected following an entrance examination designed to test logical thought and power of expression and the combination of brains and charm brought articles in the Iraq Times, Rhodesia Herald and the Cairo Times. The girls were photographed with books and bicycles, with the college head and college gatekeeper - the same person - for, as they explained, "you try to be in by 11pm because otherwise Miss Murray has to sit up - we can't afford a porter yet".

Miss Rosemary Murray was more than that. She was the person who fixed any broken electrical equipment, who looked after the two college punts when they had a river frontage and tended gardens when they moved to Huntingdon Road. She served on numerous outside bodies, educational councils and commissions and became the University's first woman Vice Chancellor.

The starting point for the new college came in 1946 when a Memorial was presented to the Senate to consider what changes should be made in the status of women in the University. By December 1947 they had agreed to admit them as members, a change ratified by the King in April 1948. Girton and Newnham, the two established ladies colleges were formally recognised, but after a few years it was felt that more places were needed to balance the increasing numbers of male undergraduates. In July 1952 a meeting chaired by the Principal of Newnham established an Association to work for a third foundation for women and the die was cast.

Amongst the many difficulties to be tackled were finance, accommodation and name. Few responded to a fund-raising party to be hosted by R.A. Butler at 11 Downing Street but money came from educational trusts, individuals and colleges. A freehold site of "The

Orchard" on Huntingdon Road was given to the new college by two daughters of Horace Darwin, though Sir Charles Darwin was unwilling for the family name to be used for the venture. By ballot supporters chose "New Hall" as an alternative.

But the first home for the new college was "The Hermitage", a large Guest House in Silver Street. The new building was soon overcrowded, a dining room full with 50 was overflowing with 80, people eating their meals in the college office whilst the cooks, striving to cope, were resorting to an old gas oven in the pantry to supplement the one in the kitchen.

Meanwhile fund raising efforts were boosted by donations from the National Union of Women Teachers and others whilst the Isaac Wolfson Foundation grant of £100,000 would go towards the new dining block. By 1962 work was underway - just part of a variety of developments along the Huntingdon Road which with the adjacent Fitzwilliam College was changing the overall character of the area. Electronic computers were brought in to reduce delays caused by the severe winter and the first part of new building was occupied in October 1964. Building activity was still apparent when the Queen Mother formally opened the College in June 1965, speaking of the foresight and courage that had led to its establishment, whose first President, by then Dame Rosemary Murray, retired in September 1981._

Stories from a year 1955

In September 1955 the first house was completed on the new Arbury Estate extension, an area that would take a large bite out of Cambridge's 4,337 housing waiting list. Monkman, the builders, took out an advertisement to emphasise the speed of their construction, started 1st June, occupied 17th September.

Others took much longer to complete their dream house. Several families responded to an advertisement in the local paper announcing a meeting for ordinary people who were prepared to co-operate to build their own homes. Cambridge Self-Build Society was set up and eventually they learned of some building plots in the barren fields and allotments off Milton Road. Soon however the landscape was changing as roads were laid and plots pegged out.

The men bought a second-hand cement mixer some scaffolding, some spades and the various bits and pieces needed to build a house. This included floodlights so work could continue long into the night as "Essex Close" started to rise. It was one way of beating the housing shortage. Post-war housing had started with pre-fabs as a temporary measure; 450 were built in Church End and Walpole Way, 100 in the Lichfield, Golding road area, another 40 at Gilbert Close. Mowlems erected concrete 'Easiform' houses at a cost of £1,400 providing dwellings within the capacity of people to pay, after all not everybody could afford 35/- (£1.75) per week!

By 1952 the Council had built 2,000 non-traditional houses since the war but when that year Ernest Marples opened the 5,000th Unity steel and concrete house he urged caution on those who advocated cutting costs by reducing standards "one had got to stop somewhere, otherwise we could be building little pigeon houses with one room upstairs and one down"

By 1954 there was a 15-year waiting list for council houses and nearly half of new buildings were set aside to re-house people living in some 1,250 "slum" dwellings. Not all residents relished departure to pastures new; their small houses might be over a century old, with a blank wall at the back, inadequate ventilation, lavatories or drainage but they were in the New Town or Fitzroy Street areas with their local amenities and community spirit.

The new Arbury was bleak and unwelcoming.

The Mayor urged the erection of large blocks of flats in the newly cleared area rather than taking acres of agricultural land but instead eyes turned to the County Council smallholdings and poultry farms on the north of the town, already separated from Milton Road by a line of houses. Gilbert Road had been established shortly after the Great War and sold off to speculative developers who had erected villas but other development had paused for the Second. Now it was all systems go again.

But as the vast estate mushroomed and new phases expanded towards Kings Hedges Road some thought it less of an estate than a New Town without the facilities of a new town. An Editorial of December 1968 described it as "an urban wilderness, a dormitory suburb with no life of its own"; others termed it "slumburbia", "like a prairie" and "completely soulless"

The plan unveiled in February 1955 had included provision for shops, schools, a pub, cinema and two churches. The cinema did not materialise but the church did. For a while the congregation met in individual houses but then an army hut was bought for their first church. In July 1957 Princess Margaret came to lay the foundation stone of the permanent building, returning nearly 20 years later for a service to celebrate its completion.

Other facilities have followed, adventure playground, community centre and according to the children who live there it is "a friendly place... I love Arbury and never want to move away"

Stories from a year, 1956...__

In April 1956 it was goodbye to the bandstand and with it a memory of the Titanic sank.

The bandstand in question had been constructed for the Royal Show held on Midsummer Common in 1894. The arrival of such a large showpiece event had caused considerable disruption: Midsummer Fair had been diverted to Stourbridge Common and the young trees that had been planted along Victoria Avenue just two years before were dug up moved to the other side of the river and replanted when the machinery and crowds had dispersed.

As the Common was brought back to normality so the bandstand was moved a few hundred yards to Christ's Pieces where it became the centre for much entertainment. Robert Austin remembered in 1956 how he had performed there as band boy, bandsman and conductor for over 45 years. He recalled the various local bands that had competed for public acclaim including the Volunteers Band forerunner of the Territorials, the bands of the Cambridge University Rifle Volunteers, Borough Police and the Cambridge Town Band, between all of whom there was intense rivalry.

It had been the Town Band that scored when they raised the record collection of over £35 mainly in coppers during a Sunday afternoon concert in aid of the 'Titanic' disaster victims following the tragic sinking in 1912.

However the Police had their own disaster when their inaugural trip to Coton had gone wrong. First the wagon that was to convey them had broken on Market Hill forcing the men in blue to dash to a waiting omnibus, leaving one of their colleagues to book the offending vehicle for obstruction! Then on departure the replacement carriage found itself bogged down to the axles in mud and when finally extricated the horses bolted coming down Madingley Hill throwing its passengers off on either side as it galloped away.

By comparison the Cambridge bandstand was very civilised - even though in the early days it was lighted by naked gas jets that usually blew out and had to be relit several times during a performance.

There was no enclosure of any kind and often a noisy crowd of shouting children and young hooligans would mingle right up to the edge of the bandstand leaving the audience well on the outskirts.

Popular concerts were very well supported: in 1910 a series attracted an average audience of 740 people which made a substantial profit, even at only one penny admission.

More serious music by contrast traditionally fared badly and the following year an attempt to promote a series of symphony concerts featuring such names as Henry Wood Edward Elgar and Thomas Beecham flopped badly. The largest audience attracted to the bandstand was in the late 1930s when the Cambridge Band, an amalgamation of the Town and Albion Bands, performed there only a few hours after being “on the air” at Broadcasting House in London.

But the Christ’s Pieces venue was also used for other functions; mass meetings of many kinds were addressed from its stage, open-air dancers swayed rhythmically around its columns and for a while Cambridge Men’s Brotherhood held an annual open-air service there

But in April 1956 it all passed away and no longer would its festoon of coloured lights compete with a lavish decoration of flowers to see which could out-rival the sunset whilst the band played at Cambridge’s favourite outdoor venue.

Stories from a year, 1957

In May 1957 the talk was of a centrally heated leisure centre complete with swimming pool and roof-top tennis court and incorporating a magnificent dining room with a cellar stocked with every kind of wine. In addition a ballroom so popular that dances would be held in the afternoon otherwise nobody would be able to tear themselves away until the early hours of the morning. Four lifts serviced the complex. For maximum utility the building would double as a Council Chamber and be home for the Mayor. This City Councillors’ dream actually existed and was then being torn down to make way for shops and offices in St Andrews Street. Its official name was Ruberdome after the red brick of which it was built. Everyone knew it as Rance’s Folly

Henry Rance was born in Ely, son of the landlord of the Lamb Hotel. He had studied as a solicitor in Mildenhall before establishing an extensive practice in Cambridge about 1828. Forty years later he was elected to the Council becoming an Alderman and serving three years as Mayor. He also filled other hours in a multitude of public positions from visitor of Fulbourn Asylum to Conservator of the Cam. In 1884 he was presented with two solid silver fruit dishes in recognition of his civic service and died in London in May 1891.

His house outlived him. He had built it in the 1850s and part incorporated an office but it was in the magnificent dining room with its mathematical ceiling that Rance held council meetings during his second period as Mayor in 1882. His reputation for hospitality was lavish and several thousand pounds a year was spent on food and drink for his friends.

Young gentlemen of the University were welcomed into his home, where he offered them tuition and showed off his four hundred pictures. Perhaps a greater incentive was the superb ballroom, its floor laid by German experts, especially since Rance had attractive granddaughters who enjoyed dancing and seldom found themselves without a partner. Indeed so many of his guests found themselves so enraptured that they failed to notice the passing hours and were locked out of their college that Rance insisted on the afternoon start_

Henry was a donnish Downing man who enjoyed a varied and busy life but who disliked visiting the barber. Indeed it was said that he never spent more than a shilling on a haircut and only had one every eight weeks.

Nothing was the same after he left Cambridge. For a while the Liberal Club used his former home for their meetings but the flat roofed building was soon dismissed as a "Folly".

In May 1957 John Hales Tooke recalled its past glories in a newspaper article which appeared as the workmen were demolishing the giant extravagant, Hollywood style mansion.

CDN 19.2.1904

Cambridge Liberals have been turned out of their handsome home in St Andrew's Street. Few provincial political clubs have had such a palatial clubhouse with large lofty rooms, spacious hall and staircase with a terrace overlooking gardens. The deceased Alderman, Henry Rance, who built the extensive premises practically ruined himself in the process but conferred a great advantage upon hundreds of men who met there for social as well as political purposes. Members are now removed to a property in St Tibb's Row formerly occupied by a now defunct newspaper until new premises are completed on the site of the old Bird Bolt Hotel.

Mike Petty Stories from a year, 1958

In 1958 they found a solution to the eternal problem of car parking in Cambridge. Ever since the Honourable undergraduate C.S. Rolls had brought the first car to the town in 1897 the mechanical monster had proved a problem. By 1907 it was felt doubtful if any other town of similar size had so many cars and motorbikes as Cambridge in term time, cars that not only knocked over cows in Victoria Avenue but also kicked up dust, cars that exceeded the speed limit at their peril; a taxi driver being fined £2 for driving at 12 mph in 1909.

As traffic increased so new measures were urged to control them. In 1921 staggered lunch hours were being urged to relieve congestion and four years later one, _way traffic was introduced in Market Street and Petty Cury. But if moving cars created difficulties, finding somewhere to park was already the subject of considerable lament. In 1925 one motorist turned to verse to echo his frustration in rhymes that would be equally applicable today.

Relief was soon available with the opening of Drummer Street bus station but the area devoted to cars was soon found to be inadequate and in 1932 New Square car park was opened.

It proved only a temporary solution, by 1934 cars and bikes were often parked so closely in Petty Cury and Sidney Street that pedestrians could not find space to cross over. Parking restrictions were introduced in 1936 which limited motorists to just fifteen minutes, using different sides of the streets on odd or even days and more one-way systems brought into operation.

Already the idea of using commons for cars was being urged and in 1938 came the suggestion of an underground car park on Market Hill, which could double for an air raid shelter in the fast-approaching war_

The war-time restrictions on petrol eased the problem for a while but with its end in 1950 came a survey which showed that whilst 43,000 motorists used New Square and 59,000 parked on Market Hill the favourite parking area was at the rear of the Lion Hotel, attracting over 80,000 cars in a year. No wonder the Council had announced its intention way back in 1948 of acquiring it.

By 1951 it was felt that the lack of central parking was driving shoppers away but the Trades Council wanted parks on the outskirts of the town and all waiting banned.

Much depended on whether the Holford Report, the County's views on how the town should develop, was implemented. The debate and arguments rumbled on... enlarge Lion Yard (1954), scrap Lion yard and Build on the outskirts instead (1956). 1957 saw a plethora of plans ... parking meters in February, Park Street multi-storey car park in April, under Parker's Piece in May. The Parker's Piece plan was deferred until October, the Park Street plan was deferred until the Parker's Piece plan had been discussed, the parking meters idea came up again ... and in the context of all this came the new idea. One morning in June 1958 Cambridge awoke to find that the Undergraduates had come up with their own solution.

Whilst some were saying put cars in the air, and others wanted them underground they had taken action.

Parked neatly on top of the roof of the Senate House was an Austin 7 van. It had arrived there overnight and stayed for several days, finally having to be cut into sections before it could be brought down, perhaps a high price to pay for free parking in central Cambridge!

Stories from a year 1959...

James Ratcliffe had been a dealer in earthenware back in the 1790s and had always paid up whenever he crossed Silver Street Bridge - if he was caught by the toll keeper. Sometimes however he came to Cambridge early and left late so that he got away without.

William Royston a farmer at Hardwick reported that when he'd crossed the bridge and paid the toll they had the wagon marked with chalk a different colour for each day. Sometimes they arranged the load so the collector could not see it above the side of the cart and were not charged.

Such were the dodges but Mrs Norris an old widow woman was toll-collector in 1760 knew most of the tricks as she hobbled along with her stick and the pitcher in which she put the money she took.

For as long as people could remember Cambridge Corporation had demanded a toll of 2d for every loaded wagon that came into town claiming that they needed the money to pay for the upkeep of the streets and bridges.

However others pointed out that as a result of an 1788 Act of Parliament these responsibilities had been transferred to a new body, the Cambridge Improvement Commissioners, who were authorised to levy taxes for road repairs. Why then should people pay twice and what was the money being spent on?

The Editor of the Cambridge Independent Press was sure he knew: "on scenes of riot and gluttony on feasts monthly annual and occasional on every pretext on midnight orgies for councillors".

In 1824 Messrs Beales and Company refused to pay the tolls and were taken to court. The trial involved extensive readings from ancient documents going back to Domesday Book. The hearing lasted for a day and a half by the end of which the Lord Chief Justice was "so inaudible from exhaustion" that he could scarcely be heard as he summed up the case. The

jury had no doubts in deciding the Corporation had no right to the tolls they had hitherto collected. Two more cases followed. The Corporation won the second but lost the decider.

All of that was very annoying especially as the bridge itself was in need of a total rebuild. Public subscriptions were sought towards the cost of £1,956 and the work entrusted to Charles Finch. At his foundry on the Market Hill he cast the iron span that made the new bridge which opened in 1841 virtually the twin of the Great Bridge in Magdalene Street. Sadly it failed to last as well.

An inspection in 1913 revealed the need for repair and by 1950 it was found to be unsafe. Both Queens' College and the Anchor public house were opposed to anything that involved extensive pile-driving fearing damage to their own foundations. A design by Sir Edwin Lutyens was accepted and work started in July 1958 with the erection of a temporary footbridge.

Inevitably there were complications but in March 1959 the bridge reopened to traffic. Then just when everything appeared to be finished the workmen were back digging up the surface pumps were sent for and dams sunk. Some said contractors had hit an underground river, others that the bridge was sinking, that the banks had started to subside and anyway the thud of the pumps was ruining the summer.

But by August 1959 all was settled: Cambridge had a new Silver Street bridge and traffic was again free to cross it though there was still money to be paid to council coffers should it actually want to park.

Stories from a Year – 1960 (slightly reduced)

“In the evening of Thursday the 2nd of July, the lofty wooden bridge over the Cam ... frequently called the Mathematical Bridge broke down. It had been in a decayed state for a considerable time, and boards had been put up several days previous to its falling in, to prevent persons going over. The bridge was erected in the year 1768, from a design by the late Mr James Essex, an eminent architect”

In these words the Cambridge Chronicle of 12th July 1810 records one incident in the story of the bridge at Garret Hostel Lane. The same issue contains a notice of proposals for a cast-iron bridge proposed near Queens' College in place of the 'New Bridge'. It would be adjacent to the other Essex Bridge, the wooden structure he had erected to designs by Etheridge some 20 years previously. This was later rebuilt in 1902 and is itself now known as the “Mathematical Bridge”

The collapse of Garret Hostel caused a problem for travellers, for whereas the college bridges are principally for college people, Garret Hostel was for everybody. The lane had been given to the town by King Henry VI so that its citizens might have access to the river – for he had closed many of the other lanes that used to lead to the riverside wharves when he commandeered the land needed for his new King's college.

Time after time the bridge needed repair and the bills were shared jointly between Trinity Hall and the town of Cambridge. Finally the college had contributed their half of the expense of building Essex's 'Mathematical Bridge' on the understanding that they would be free from all future claims. So the town paid for it to be patched up. It was soon in trouble again – a wooden bridge just did not have the permanence required.

In 1835 tenders were sought for a cast-iron bridge. The contract was awarded to the Butterley Iron Company and the work undertaken by Finch's iron foundry, a local company famous for

such work. The result was a fine bridge in the Gothic style which featured on as many postcard views as some of its older college neighbours. Despite their earlier agreement Trinity Hall contributed over a quarter of the cost of £960 19s 6d with other colleges joining in.

But by 1959 the bridge was in the news again, settlement having caused the cast iron to fracture, making repairs essential but uneconomic. This time it was not the college but one of its students who picked up the bill. The Trusted Family had been associated with Trinity Hall for 50 years and Sir Harry Trusted, Q.C., decided that a tangible way of recognising the link would be to build the new bridge.

His intention was a bridge that would be an honest example of twentieth century craftsmanship, aiming to please present and future generations. The result was unveiled in October 1960. It won praise for its design, but not from cyclists – some felt the gradient was so steep that only the fittest could bike over it, another that it was an ideal training ground for mountaineers. 40 years on it still taxes the muscles of all who cross it.

Stories from a year 1961

Stories from a year by Mike Petty – 1961

Kings Parade was the most miserable street in Cambridge – wherever one looked there was anguish – so ran one old saying about the street, alluding to the names displayed above the shop fronts where Sadd, Greef, and Pain could be found.

In 1914 Mr. A. H. Sadd moved his old-established Curiosity shop around the corner into St. Edwards Passage, breaking the sequence. He then added to the misery felt by the rest of the town when he threw himself to his death by leaping from the top of Kings College chapel.

“Miserable” is not a word often applied to the Chapel itself. Usually it is praised in glowing terms – “the unparalleled ornament of all England” – and others have climbed to the roof, like Sadd. In March 1627 the Duke of Buckingham, favourite of King Charles I and Chancellor of the University, refused to take part in what was then the custom of having the shape of his foot, together with his name and arms cut in the lead of the roof. – it was, he said, too high for him. However later that year an Antiquarian visitor escorted his new bride to the same height where she left her dainty footprint – one of the smallest in England, but then she was only 13 years old!

In 1660 the Cambridge town band played music from the top of the Chapel and soldiers fired a volley of shots to mark the Restoration of King Charles II. Although Cromwell’s men had used the chapel as a drill hall the famous stained glass had been spared the widespread destruction that was ordered elsewhere by William Dowsing.

The chapel bells were also intact at the time, hanging in a wooden building to the west of the chapel which by 1728 was in such a poor condition that the bellringer, Henry West, was crushed to death when one fell on him. The building was demolished in 1739 and the bell sold for scrap 15 years later.

Some have arrived at the chapel in sedan chair – such as Andrew Snape college Provost, who suffered badly from gout and needed to be lifted into his stall. Others have arrived in dead of night. William Grimshaw and Richard Kidman got a key to the outer door in 1800, and for several nights let themselves in and steadily worked their way picking the other locks that stood between themselves and a valuable collection of college coins and medals. Grimshaw, however, became scared – “the place looked so awful, that he trembled every time as if he had the ague” and he left Kidman to it. Both were caught and transported to Australia.

In March 1961 the College announced that they had been offered the gift of a work of art of the very first rank – the painting of the Adoration of the Magi by the Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens. It had been recently purchased for a world record price of £250,000 by Major Alfred Allnatt who had been searching for an appropriate ecclesiastical building in which to display it.

In November the heavy wooden panel, measuring 12ft by 9ft, arrived in a 30ft lorry and trailer, escorted by two security guards and an Alsatian dog, concerned less about robbery than a student rag. Ten men took two hours to get the picture to the chapel doors and the 13 hundredweight masterpiece was winched on to a giant easel beside the chapel screen where it was to stay whilst they worked out quite how to display it as an altarpiece.

In April 1964 it was moved to the East end, and four years later, confirmed in its position following a major restoration. Not all agree that the Adoration and the setting complement each other. As one man wrote to the Cambridge News in December 1968; “The restored Chapel at King’s College is magnificent but I feel that if the Rubens was moved to the right, say as far as the Fitzwilliam Museum, it would look even better.

Stories from a year 1962

Funerals are sombre affairs mourners follow the hearse with reverence and sadness and the deceased despatched with due dignity

But undergraduates sent down for committing some breach of University discipline were once given a more rousing send off in a tradition known as **a Mock Funeral** Enid Porter recorded how the body of the student attended by a surpliced "clergyman" was usually carried from his College on a board and placed in a waiting cab. This then drove off towards the station followed by the "choir" and a crowd of "Mourners" in various strange costumes. The journey would be enlivened by strident music the singing of hymns and popular songs and the reading of "Lessons" from Gray's "Anatomy or some other textbook depending on the subject which the expelled man had been reading. At the station the "corpse would be placed in the guard's van and the "nails knocked in the coffin" by undergraduates who clambered on the roof and hammered on it with brooms.

On one occasion in 1920 the "body" escaped from the van and the huge crowd of mourners stormed the buses waiting outside the station and rode back to the centre of town followed by cars filled with shouting undergraduates. They eventually caught up with the "dead man" as he was walking back in procession to the Market Place with the "clergyman" and the "choir. Traffic in Cambridge ground to a halt as the streets became clogged, causing public annoyance.

More offence was caused in 1910 when the cortege included members of the Cambridge University Officer Training Corps in uniform and with rifles reversed. This was thought to be in bad form since it was soon after the funeral of King Edward VII. The following years saw two other Mock Funerals which prompted the University authorities to try and ban them although the practice reoccurred spasmodically. One example was in 1921 when the University were considering whether to award degrees to women. A colossal mock funeral was held for "The death of the Varsity with the corpse of the last male undergraduate being borne on a bier surrounded by aged mourners whose long grey beards dragged in the dust.

Another was in 1962 when 2 undergraduates were sent down for failing their examinations. This time their sports car was pulled through the streets and despite the stir it caused it was according to Miss Porter "a poor affair compared to the elaborate ones of the past"

Many of the old traditions have died out and the town is more peaceful for it.

One such was the "Chariot of fire" in 1920 when a hansom cab was commandeered and set alight before being driven around Market Hill. Although the cabbie was well compensated, and their companions hoped for similar treatment for their ancient vehicles others would have been concerned at the treatment of the horse pulling the blazing vehicle. The exercise was repeated in 1921 when the Chariot collided with the telephone kiosk and in 1945 when a landau was soaked in petrol set alight and paraded through the town.

It was quite usual for bonfires to be started by students ripping the wooden shutters from shops pulling up garden fences or gates to add to the blaze. In 1900 the underground toilets on the Market then under construction were raided for fuel to celebrate the relief of Ladysmith and such was the damage caused in 1905 that the University authorities paid £200 compensation to townsfolk who had had to defend their property against the undergraduate mob. Damage of a similar sum was caused in 1959 following the roughest November 5th for 20 years when a banger battle was fought in the town centre. But perhaps the worst incident was in 1948 when it was not a banger that was thrown at the Senate House but a hand grenade and it was fortunate there was no real funeral to follow that example of youthful high spirits.

Stories from a year 1963...

In July 1963 a Princess met a **Viscountess** that had once been the plaything of the Prince of Wales. The Viscountess was then seventy, five years old, thick skinned and still watertight, though the original spark that she used to derive from 200 storage batteries had long been extinguished. Indeed a petrol engine had been substituted some time after the Prince had become King Edward VII in 1901. The "lady" in question was named after the wife of Viscount Bury who when in Canada during the 1870s had met the American inventor, Edison and discussed the possibilities of electric vehicles. The initial experiments proved negative but the Viscount found more success with an Electric Launch Company who's largest and finest boat was named "Viscountess Bury".

For four seasons she was on charter to the Prince of Wales but then became a public passenger launch plying the Thames. In 1910 she was acquired by H.C. Banham of Cambridge and brought around the East coast and down the Ouse to the Cam. It was here in 1911 that Bill Leach fell in love with her when as a boy he paid his sixpence to take a trip down to Clayhithe, admiring the bright varnish and polished brass of what had once been described as "the largest electric launch in the world".

But the "Viscountess" was not the only boat to ply the Cam in those days. Steam tugs such as the "Nellie" and "Olga" were still to be seen and the large 70 ton steam barge "Nancy" plied regularly to Cambridge bringing timber from Kings Lynn until August 1914. In 1927 "Nancy II" took to the rivers, a diesel barge bought by Banhams from Holland she was really too large and was taken out of service after nine months.

But in addition to the business craft there were the pleasure boats.

One such was the "Idle Hour", originally a workboat at Kings Lynn, which was fitted with a steam engine by Lack of Cottenham. Soon renamed "Dove" she capsized and sank beneath a boat builder's shop in 1914. It was here that Bill Leach's brother discovered her in 1926 and between them they managed to make the wreck float and steam again. The success was short-lived, soon the boiler was useless and the hull a mere receptacle for fallen leaves in a forgotten corner of another boatyard. When his brother left to build roads in Africa the hulk became the property of the Cambridge schoolteacher. An amateur poet and playwright, an expert renovator of grandfather clocks and with an abiding love for things mechanical A.F. Leach inspired his pupils, fascinated them with tales of travel and, occasionally took them for

trips down the river. They might return covered in sooty smuts but each had his turn at stoking the furnace of the steamboat that he rebuilt and renamed "Phoenix".

For twenty years this relic of a bygone age could be seen steaming up the river, a dirty, stinking old thing" to some, a source of unmitigated delight to its owner. And if a Viscount could name a boat after his wife, then so could a teacher, and "Kathleen" became as much of a character as her Royal neighbour on the Cam. In 1952 the dream had to end, the hull was just too weak to take any more pupils on river trips. But Leach was not finished, he acquired another, rebuilt and refurbished, polished and perfected until once more he owned the largest, finest and fastest steamboat on the river Cam.

Princess Margaret was just one of thousands who has been entertained on the "Viscountess Bury" and the memory has faded, but to thousands of his pupils the fond memory of the late and lamented "Steamboat Bill" Leach will remain fresh.

Stories from a year 1964

Stories from a year by Mike Petty – 1964

In April 1964 Kings College chapel authorities watched with trepidation as the great Rubens painting of the Adoration of the Magi was repositioned as an altar-piece.

The artist had visited Cambridge and been awarded an Honorary M. A. by the University but his painting had been commissioned by the White Sisters of Louvain who were in a hurry and, tradition has it, the job was completed in just eight days. They had paid Reubens 920 florins for it in 1634, but it cost a world record price of £275,000 when purchased by Major A. E. Allnatt who gave it to the College in 1961.

At first it had been installed on scaffolding beside the screen but now it was being moved to a giant steel support specially designed for it. Great care had to be devoted to ensure that the wood on which it is painted did not flex and crack as it was lifted into place.

Any change to the great chapel was sure to create controversy and the Adoration was no exception. How much more debate and concern must have been shown when the great stained glass windows themselves were removed.

Overnight the glass disappeared, stripped from the windows by a group of students, packed in hampers and buried in pits in the gardens, pits that were quickly filled in. By daybreak the deed was done. Passers by stared in amazement and the word spread rapidly. Soon crowds gaped and gossiped surely it was the work of Cromwell and his soldiers – typical of the desecration they were wreaking in churches throughout the Kingdom in 1637.

In fact this version was fiction, invented by a Clare college man, Sabine Baring Gould, and told in "The Chorister", a tale of the Civil War which ran to several editions in the 1890's.

But fiction turned to fact in 1939 with the outbreak of war. At a time when Cambridge residents were being told to sandbag windows to prevent damage during air raids, the Kings College authorities were themselves debating the steps needed to safeguard their stained glass. Some questioned the wisdom of removing the glass – what good would the glass be if the chapel itself was destroyed?

But other councils prevailed and the glass was taken down, the windows being boarded up for the duration of the war. The light and colourful interior became dark and sombre to match the mood of the time.

With peace came restoration. In April 1951 King George VI paid what was to be his last visit to Cambridge to join in the Thanksgiving Service for the completion of the task of replacing the glass.

Cambridge had escaped serious damage during that War as it had in the First. Then its citizens had flocked in to the colours after hearing of the destruction wreaked on the Belgian University town of Louvain – the original home of the “Adoration” that now graces Kings College Chapel.

Stories from a year: 1965

Things that went bump in the night troubled the light sleepers of Cambridge in the middle of the "Swinging Sixties". Some of the strange sounds could be traced to the Regal Cinema where the Rolling Stones rocked and P.J. Proby shocked - his act was "too smutty" and was banned. At Cherry Hinton the blame could be laid at the door of the Irish - the Clancey Brothers topping the bill at the first Cambridge Folk Festival. Mill Road was learning to live with the rattle and clatter of a new phenomenon - Ten P-in Bowling - but some of the worlds greatest brains startled at an unearthly noise right outside their bedroom windows.

Searchlights were brought in to scan the sky - in just the same way that in Reach during the Great War one old lady took her candle to investigate the ghastly, ghostly shape said to hover just above the trees.

Elsewhere through the centuries others have run towards or away from such strange sights, some glimpsed flying horsemen amongst the clouds, others saw creatures descend from them to the ground beneath ...

Near Soham in 1785 an old man and a boy had witnessed an apparition that descended from the heavens into the field in which they were working. The lad had fled, his companion had stood his ground - too scared to move; then seeing the shape appearing motionless he approached it - "in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, what are you, speak and tell me" ...

History shows that such appearances often heralded momentous occasions - Coronations or celebrations - yet in 1965 there was little of moment - the appointment of RAB Butler to Trinity, the opening of New Hall, the proposed merger between Cambridge's two football clubs. Nor could the monumental decision to abolish the need for undergraduate gowns after dark account for an incident of such magnitude.

They were troubled times. "Peace in Vietnam" banners on the pinnacles of Kings College Chapel showed concern for the International situation, and Cambridge was all too aware of the impact of attack from the air - the scrapnell wounds still visible in the Bridge Street walls of Whewell's Court combined with memories of the bombing of the Union Society just twenty-odd years before. The Kaiser had promised no zeppelin attacks on Cambridge - such as the one that had brought Reach villagers to panic - yet still one had been photographed over the town. As daylight broke on 27th October 1965 hard-headed academics witnessed a fairytale come true. But instead of a beanstalk tempting Jack to climb into the clouds there was a steel cable and far above a wartime barrage balloon was hovering. It had broken away from R.A.F. Cardington carrying its weather instruments with it and dragged its wire rope thirty miles across country before becoming hooked on scaffolding at St Johns College. Nearly two hundred years earlier other students had launched balloons from Emmanuel and Queens' but in 1965 Magdalene College was evacuated whilst this one was winched to the ground. The Soham labourer had advanced and poked his collapsed balloon but now firemen carefully avoided protrusions that might pierce the hydrogen-filled canopy and cause an explosion. It all passed peacefully but one speculates on the nineteen-sixties headlines had

the balloon as it descended been found to be carrying Mr Green and his aeronautical pony - a regular eighteen- attraction|

Stories from a year 1966

In the mid 1960s the “in-place” for the young set was a dimly lit beat club in Falcon Yard off Petty Cury. The Alley was cheap membership just 5/-(25p), the music groovy and the company good. In February 1966 however there were unexpected and uninvited guests when Cambridge police descended on force. As dogs guarded the entrance the dancers were searched nothing was found in their pockets but on the floor were pieces of Indian hemp cannabis.

The **drug** menace had also spread to University students and two Peterhouse men were each fined £50 for smoking hashish; estimates suggested that about 500 local youths were experimenting with drugs with reports that chemistry graduates were actually manufacturing LSD in Cambridge. Police set up a drugs squad amidst claims that the city was the drug distribution centre for the Eastern Region

Similar reports had been current over a century before when fenland folk were recognised as being largely dependent on opium.

In many local towns and villages it took the place of drink. The Privy Council was told in 1864 that one housewife in Lincolnshire was known to have spent £100 on the drug, and that many men never drank beer without dropping a piece of opium into it whilst brewers added narcotics to their brew, to the great surprise of any visiting drinkers.

It was thought the drug was needed to combat the rheumatic pain or "ague" that locals were prone to whilst others claimed it relieved the depression during the hard times.

Much of the farm work was undertaken by labour gangs of women and children who worked long hours in the fields and needed to leave their babies unattended for periods. It was found that a little poppy head tea was efficient at keeping the infants docile: "The young 'uns all lay about the floor like dead 'uns, and there's no bother with 'em. When they cry we give 'em a little of it - p'raps half a spoonful, and that quiets them, sometimes when they're hungry, and the victuals isn't ready for 'em, we give 'em a drop too".

It also led to an extremely high infant mortality rate. Opium was openly sold throughout the area and Charles Kingsley in his novel *Alton Lock* has a parson being told "yow goo into druggist's shop o'market-day, into Cambridge, and you'll see the little boxes, dozens and doozens, a'ready on the counter; and neve a venman's wife goo by, but what calls in for hapennard o'elevation, to last her out the week...well it keeps women-folk quiet, it do; and its mortal good agin ago pains"^^

The women were thought to be the major consumers with their dependence perhaps originating from "tasting" the opiates they gave to their children and preferred to spend money on drugs rather than doctors' bills.

A reporter in 1850 found one woman in Ely, suffering from a broken hip; she had been bedridden for six years. "The exhilarating effects of her last dose had passed off, and had given place to that wretched lowness of spirit in which the life of an opium-taker alternates. As the repulsive-looking hag sat upright in her filthy bed by the chimney corner, her uncouth and cadaverous features streaked by the various courses her tears had taken in her intervals of despondency. With her tangled grey hair hanging over her shoulders, her shrunken neck, and withered arms which were exposed to view as she rolled up another pill of the filthy-looking

drug, and raised it trembling to her discoloured lips, presented a spectacle more loathsome than imagination could conceive".^_

Might the same description apply today of the trendy young things of the dingy 60's discos who so fondly believed they were into something new.

Stories from a year by Mike Petty – 1967

The 1960's were a great period of undergraduate activity in Cambridge. There seemed to be a different sort of students – tailors had noticed a drop in their trade – 80% were now on grants and the fashion was for informal clothes with a trend to jeans & duffle-coats, sloppy-joes & 17" trouser bottoms. Nor did they hold with old tradition of wearing gowns after dark. A campaign of civil disobedience was staged with 150 students marching disrobed through the town and queuing to give their names to the University proctors.

Freedom to of dress was one thing, of expression something else. The Undergraduate magazine *Granta*, was censored after its editor, David Frost, included a poem entitled "Highwayman 474" which used a 4-letter word. There were bans too on Market Hill – at least on bonfire night 1960 when 200 police patrolled to prevent a repetition of the £200 worth of damage caused the previous year. The exercise was successful, the ban stayed. But explosions in 1962 brought a storm of protest, one Civil Defence worker pulling on his uniform before realising that it was only fireworks set off at a May Ball – the traditional celebration when "Popsey expresses" pulled into the station and the city filled with young girls anxious to sample the good life.

But college life was not all fun and in 1962 the Cambridge Samaritans branch started after 6th student suicide in year and a mock funeral took to the streets as two young men were sent down for failing their examinations.

The decade was one of innovation – the first organised rag procession of floats, the King Street run accomplished in a record 28 minutes, and in 1965 Queens College scrapped its strict male-female segregation rule making way for a new foundation that would take both sexes – a decision welcomed by the Union Society which had now opened its doors to women and in 1967 elected its first woman president, Anne Malleliou.

It was time of political awareness; a "Peace in Vietnam" banner fluttered from the pinnacles of Kings College chapel and visits by the US Ambassador, Harold Wilson and Dennis Healey all provoked protests leading the Police Federation to call for curbs on student political demos. University authorities brought in new restrictions but Police needed to mount the biggest security exercise then organised when Reginald Maudlin came to Cambridge to explain the reasons which had prompted him to deny permission for wounded German activist "Red" Rudi Dutschke taking up a place at Clare college. The newly formed Cambridge Students Union took up the case and mounted its first ever national march in London.

Student power was recognised by the University authorities setting up a consultative committee of undergraduates, graduates and senior members too but with sit-ins supporting LSE protesting students and gowns being burned on the Senate House lawns it was no wonder Cambridge attracted international press attention in 1969. Or rather one undergraduate did – a certain young man whose arrival at Trinity College could not go unnoticed but whose subsequent presence in the City passed largely unreported as he quietly pursued his studies despite the distractions of National and local life – such as the 1970 "Garden House riot" when police invoked the Riot Act against protests against holidays in Greece. But there were headlines too when that special student took part in a play, made his maiden speech in the

Union Society and crowning a May Week Queen, as he himself had been earlier crowned at Carnarvon.

Stories from a year 1968 by Mike Petty
CWN 9 Aug 1990

It might have world-wide implications but consider the environment Cambridge was no place for it. News of a dream machine that would whisk people at 300 mph bring Edinburgh a mere one hour away from London and high speed rail link with London's third airport excited many but appalled some. "A monster of steel and concrete will now drive an ugly path along the haunts of snipe and redshank.

The wild ducks dropping in on whickering wing will be frightened off by a three hundred mile an hour monster humming through the winter twilight" wrote naturalist John Humphreys.

The engineers argued that the site they needed, 20 miles without a bend, could only be found between the two Bedford rivers running north from Earith and the River authority raised no objections. Others thought back to the problems which had faced the early railway pioneers as they laid their metal track across the unstable fenland, sometimes needing to drive piles to combat the shrinking peat, and at Lt Thetford was shrinking at an inch a year whilst that under the embankment at Prickwillow had dropped over six feet since it was constructed in 1845. Their doubts were reinforced when one of the large concrete beams that were being installed to provide the elevated track for the new hovertrain collapsed in August 1970. But by then some of the problems had been ironed out.

Notable amongst these had been where the headquarters for the new Company was to be based. Milton, Bar Hill, Chatteris and Ely had been prime candidates as far as the "engine drivers of March and strawberry growers of Wisbech" were concerned, but what could such county councillors know of the needs of Cambridge.

Tracked Hovercraft Ltd wanted to be in the city to be near the specialists of the University Physical Department but County officials were adamant that this would infringe their strict controls on industry within the city.

By March 1968 there was a state of war between the two authorities with attacks on the "pernicious stranglehold" that was preventing Cambridge from developing as a regional centre. But then a little local knowledge ensured success as the Company abandoned their original plans and instead set up next door on land in Ditton Walk that already had permission for industrial use.

Now the County Council had been beaten there were just the French to compete with. Their project might be further advanced but ours was better. Nor would the noise from the test bed in the fens disturb grazing cattle, nor the vibration interfere with isolated cottages or disrupt fishing. This British "Concorde of terra firma" would be racing away from its rivals with advanced linear motors that would whisk the Hovertrain high above the boggy fen. The weather had other ideas as the first public launch had to be cancelled due to fen fog but by December 1971a

Staggering 12 mph had been obtained. By August 1972 they were up to 72 mph, and had permission to build more track.

The Japanese were interested and the British Government reconsidering the venture as funds ran down. January 1973 saw speeds in excess of 106 mph and local MPs urging for a speedy decision on the project's future. Next month came the news, it was to be scrapped with parts sold off to other companies, a decision that brought uproar in the House and complaints of short-sightedness, pessimism, lack of initiative and incompetence.

A Select Committee was scathingly critical of the decision to abandon the project, the one major centre in the country of a new technology. They also attacked the way that the workers had been bundled out of their Ditton Walk offices within 36 hours of the announcement of the cancellation.

But not all were upset as the Earith site was finally dismantled and the fens went back to their isolated peace.

Stories from a year - 1969

Rag Day is now regarded as a traditional part of Cambridge life, a day on which anything may happen.

"Rags" - defined as a "noisy disorderly scene" - have been part of University life for many years but usually involved pitched battles with police, destruction and general hooliganism.

For example in 1904 undergraduates surged through the streets and attempted to start a bonfire on Market Hill. A contingent of mounted police charged the crowd which fled down Petty Cury where a confectioner's shop window was broken and various sweets looted. From there the mob spread towards Parker's Piece where they ripped-up railings from three houses and started a fire. Anything that would burn was seized including a watchman's shelter which was smashed with pickaxes and added to the blaze.

Once again police tried to disperse them, succeeded in making an arrest and conveyed the prisoner to the police station despite determined efforts to free him. Once safely inside the crowd attempted a rescue, hurling missiles at policemen guarding the entrance. Meanwhile another fire was started on New Square and the bandstand on Christ's Pieces had to be defended to prevent it being added to the flames. Another police charge was needed before the mob was cleared and the blaze on Parkers Piece finally extinguished by the Fire Brigade amidst the jeers and sneers of onlookers.

It was horseplay of this sort and the fear of further disturbance so near Bonfire Night that prompted the town authorities to refuse the British Legion permission to organise Poppy-Day collections for a number of years. But then they took the bold step of allowing the University to participate and on the 10th November 1922 the first Poppy Day rag was held. A procession of "animals" toured the town with a police escort and was hailed as one of the happiest Rags ever seen. It started a tradition that continued until recent times and raised thousands of pounds for the Earl Haig appeal.

The first organised procession of floats was held in 1963 but shortly afterwards everything seemed to fall apart. Many colleges began to boycott the Rag, wanting the money collected to go to other groups as well as the Legion appeal. Following great debate and public concern other charities were added to the list but people became less tolerant of flour bombs, rotten tomatoes, water pistols and eggs and in 1967 the "Poppy Day" rag was held for the last time, its demise marked with fighting between student-s and local youths.

When revived in February 1969 the event flopped - many people did not even know it was on - subsequent years attracted little more support and by 1974 enthusiasm was reported at an all-time low. Jubilee Year 1977 saw a revival in its fortunes and in 1980 the organisation was

taken over by the Cambridge Students Union who succeeded in uniting town and gown and making the Rag a unifying rather than divisive feature of Cambridge life.

Mike Petty Stories from a year 1970

It was March 1836 when Cambridge first saw a police force established under the Municipal Corporations Act. The initial provision was for a total of 31 policemen who operated from The Mews in Millers Lane (now Emmanuel Street). After 16 years they moved to part of Hobson's Workhouse in St Andrews Street, premises which had provided shelter and employment for those in need but was also used as a house of correction for unruly and stubborn rogues.

The accommodation seems to have been more secure than that in the adjacent Spinning House, which University authorities used to imprison the numerous prostitutes who were attracted to a town full of young gentlemen undergraduates. There was uproar when one of the girls escaped through a window and went home to Dullingham. The Vice Chancellor ordered the police to rearrest her as a gaol breaker and at the trial at the Assize she was duly found guilty but such was the publicity attending the case that the Home Secretary intervened and ordered her release. More bad publicity followed and in 1894 the Vice Chancellor's power to send women to the Spinning House was abolished.

The old buildings were demolished and in October 1901 a large new police station was officially opened. Its Renaissance style front, groined ceilings and mosaic floors won it warm architectural praise and the modern speaking tubes and basement room for drying clothes and making coffee placed it in the forefront of police development nationally. James Sutton and Charles Smith were best able to testify to some of the other facilities for they were the first to sample the cells, one for stealing walnuts, the other for drunkenness.

Meanwhile on Castle Hill another police station had been opened in October 1879 to provide a base for the County Force, established in 1851 after much debate. The two forces worked side by side. Another small station was opened at Mitcham's Corner where it stood until 1930 when it was replaced by a police box.

As the service developed it assumed extra duties; from 1921 the Police not only fought crime but fires as well, replacing the Volunteer Fire Brigades, until the establishment of the Auxiliary Fire Service in 1938. All this put pressure on available space and the Council sought new accommodation. By 1940 they had identified a site on Parkside for a new Police and Fire station but numerous complications arose. Eventually the fire station – by then a County Council responsibility – was officially opened in 1965.

In that year the City and County police forces amalgamated with others – a development that had been anticipated by the appointment of a single Chief Constable for both forces in 1963 – and so it was that Frederick Drayton Porter was in charge when Parkside Police Station opened in October 1970 as the first major building undertaken by "Mid Anglia Constabulary". That force was itself restructured and renamed "Cambridgeshire Constabulary" in 1974.

The new building cost over £145,000 and included provision for Traffic Wardens, a garage block and parking as well as space for storing a large number of bicycles – an ever-present problem as the newspaper of 1910 recorded. "Cambridge", it said, "is an irresistible attraction for professional thieves down from London". It was commenting on the arrest of a gang caught loading bikes on to a train at the station – just one of the successes of the Cambridge bobby over the years.

Stories from a year 1971

“Clamp-down on tourist parties as pedestrians jams hit colleges”, read the headlines of July 1971. They might be echoed in virtually any other year, and have been repeated only weeks ago.

Cambridge has always been a centre of attraction, Kings and Queens, Emperors and Shahs have all made the journey and all experienced the difficulty of travel. Today the roads are congested, in days gone by they were rutted and the trip from London was something to be dreaded. In 1700 Edmund Ward set off from Bishopsgate in one of those romantic images of olden days -the stage coach. But Edmund found it "a dirty lumbering wooden hovel" and did not appreciate being crammed inside with his traveling companions, one of which was a young baby being violently ill at both ends!

With the coming of the railways in 1845 travel became much easier and by 1853 a guidebook commented that although some visitors still arrived by the "semi-barbarous" stagecoaches the much larger contingent now arrived by train. Such excursionists found themselves deposited on the outskirts of the town, forced out by University opposition which defeated numerous proposals for more central stations. Indeed the visitor who arrived on a Sunday might not find himself in Cambridge at all, since at first no trains were allowed to stop at the station on the Sabbath for fear that hordes of visitors would profane that Holy day for those who lived and worked in the University.

By 1912 there was pressure from railwaymen to advertise Cambridge like a seaside town to encourage visitors during the Long Vacation when the town -and its shops - traditionally closed down. Yet whilst some campaigned for more visitors, others condemned their too casual dress, especially in such areas as the Backs where there were complaints in 1937 of "nudity".

The American visitor was traditionally the butt of much humour. In 1910 one disgruntled commentator found them "so mean that it is absolutely unprofitable to have anything to do with them". Many came to know the area through their war service and when in 1950 US Travel Agency heads visited Cambridge they saw "vast potentiality".

Some of that potential was realised in 1951 when the Festival of Britain saw the establishment of an Information Bureau as part of the central Library. That year two undergraduates started to organise University tours three times a day attracting 100 people a week whilst many others showed themselves round using the little guide by Ruth Mellanby which had been published the previous year.

By 1964 it was felt that more tourists would be welcomed by traders and the residents would benefit from more entertainment during the quiet summer months; but those who did come complained that it was spoilt by parking difficulties!

As Cambridge has boomed as a tourist centre so the principal colleges experience more and more pressure, especially during the examination period, and have closed their gates to control the constant flow of visitors. Yet in the hard commercial world they have also promoted the use of their buildings for Conferences, rented rooms to the Language Schools that have multiplied in recent years and started charging admission.

In 1971 I organised a display in the Guildhall devoted to the historical development of Tourism. In opening it, the Mayor said "It is not the policy of the City Council to attract more visitors to Cambridge". He said so whilst standing in front of a photographic display just commissioned by the City Council to do precisely that!

Stories from a year –1972

The solution to the eternal parking problem did not survive the removal of the Austin 7 van in 1958. But the concept of cars above houses was that year approved not in Senate House Hill but in the prophetically named Park Street. Elsewhere homes in Doric and Gothic streets were demolished to make space for more motors and multi-storeys were proposed for Donkeys Common and King Street.

Others wanted parking meters, park and ride and underground car parks on Parker's Piece and Lion Yard.

Thus was the stage set and throughout the 1960's most of the alternative ideas were recycled.

Some action came in 1963 with the opening of Cambridge's first multi-storey, dwarfing Cambridge's last thatched cottage near Park Street but a proposed underground loop road from Emmanuel Road to Jesus Lane was quickly buried and Parker's Piece again rejected.

Then in 1964 came the first parking meters. The charges of 1/- (5p) an hour would "produce a profit of £10,000 a year and they would pay for themselves within three" (in fact by 1972 they had earned £101,000 and cost £145,000 in administration). Their immediate impact was to clear the streets, with long queues for car parks which were already full; traffic conditions were described as frightful and some traders reported a 78% dip in their takings.

Double yellow lines began to appear in March 1965, plans were drawn and debated and somebody suggested Parker's Piece again. Shoppers switched to the Fitzroy Street area where parking was easier and where the talk of redevelopment seemed as unlikely as anything actually happening in Lion Yard. Yet in the centre things were changing though not for the better. In 1969 parking meter charges were doubled and one of the long established parking spots was closed as cars were banned from Market Hill. That Christmas the chaos was such that police had to invoke emergency powers in an attempt to clear streets clogged solid by jammed cars.

Worse was to follow next year when another central parking area became home for builders' vans rather than shoppers' cars. At long last work had started on the Lion Yard scheme after over 20 years of debate and despite a last minute hitch when University dons objected to the proposed design.

Envisaged in the Holford Report of the 1950s at a cost of £160,000, it would now come to over £700,000. And while Holford had wanted 400 cars it would now take 550. Completion was only two years away and in the meantime the Queen Anne Terrace car park and Elizabeth Bridge were due in 1971 and there was talk of pedestrianisation, a Western Relief Road, a Northern bypass and even 100 more meters

Lion yard car park finally opened in July 1972. It was designed for shoppers, its prices pitched to discourage those who wanted to park their cars longer. Thus whilst parking for the first hour was 5p, with 15p for two, 25p for three and a horrendous 35p for four it would surely be only the richest motorist who would stump up the monumental sum of 75p for a whole day's parking!

Stories from a year, 1973 – TO FIND

Stories from a year , 1974

Cleaners, cooks and caretakers shook hands with royalty in December 1974 when the Duchess of Kent formally opened the new YMCA building in Gonville Place, erected at a

cost of over £400,000 to replace the old building swept away for the Lion Yard redevelopment.

That building was not the first meeting place for the Cambridge branch of the Young Men's Christian Association which had come into being in February 1851, just 7 years after the movement's foundation in London. It existed to cultivate the mental talents of the young men of the town and to give it a religious direction. Thus they sought to provide a library of religious books, a Reading Room with religious periodicals, rooms for classes and social religious meetings as well as lectures on all subjects. But to do this it needed space.

The first rooms in Rose Crescent were too dark and hard to get to, the second in Sidney Street were defective in heating and ventilation, little better than the third home, Hobson Place where the landlord wanted to increase the agreed £30 rent. As they were by then £15 in debt things looked bleak indeed.

But the Association had a Committee which included some of the most notable of Cambridge businessmen and by 1866 when they moved yet again, this time to St Edward's Passage, such was the numbers attending lectures and using the library that much larger premises were needed.

At this time there came onto the market a site in Alexandra Street which was in the centre of town beside the Post Office next the central telegraph station surrounded by roads yet away from the noise of traffic. When other businessmen agreed to act as trustees the future was assured.

When the committee, including Mr Foster the banker Mr Bowes the bookseller, Mr Sayle the shopkeeper, Mr Munsey the Jeweller, planned a building they looked for the best architect of the time, Alfred Waterhouse.

The foundation stone was laid by William Fowler, MP in 1870 and it opened 11 months later, at a cost of £5,000. It included a lecture room that would hold 400 people which became known as the Alexandra Hall, playing an important part in the social life of the town.

It was here that in 1908 a Blackpool company first demonstrated "Animated Pictures" and it was soon in regular use, though only for films of a high moral tone. In 1910 it became one of the first three Cambridge buildings licensed under the Cinematograph Act and was the scene of regular shows.

But by February 1914 the rent was six weeks in arrears and the Committee gave them one week's notice to quit. Two new applicants asked to continue its use for the same purpose, but it was not to be. In December that year the Welsh Division marched into Cambridge and the YMCA was the one place ready to receive such invaders. For the next five years the Alexandra Hall was devoted to meeting the needs of the troops, with recreation rooms, canteen and concerts.

The process was repeated in 1939 but the work extended to the civilians evacuated to Cambridge to escape the London bombing. Nor were the troops manning the lonely searchlight and anti-aircraft stations overlooked with a Tea Car soon employed. Mobile canteens were at the Railway Station to welcome the troops returning from Dunkirk beaches and soon even the Alexandra street premises were full, men overflowing on to the pavement outside and the Tea Car supplementing the canteen. Later American troops and Italian prisoners of war came to know and appreciate the facilities.

Post-war the YMCA developed its community role once more until the needs of big business became paramount and the site was needed for redevelopment. Hence the new building

with its community rooms and study, bedrooms mainly let to non University students and business trainees that received its Royal opening in 1974

Stories from a year 1975

Beer drinkers mourned the demolition of the "Bun Shop" on St. Andrews Hill in 1975 but beyond the rebuilding of the Lion Yard area a "Red Cow" was reborn.

Bitter comments have been exchanged over pints about the loss of a favourite drinking haunt. Three of the most famous central public houses were the "Wrestlers Inn", Petty Cury which was demolished 1888, to be followed by the "Falcon Inn" nearby & in 1910 by the "Hoop Hotel", Bridge Street. This latter had been acquired by one Charles Dixon just so he could do away with the licence since he felt it was 'blasting & blighting lives of young men that went to it'.

This was part of a great period of Temperance activity occasioned by proposed changes in the Licensing regulations & in 1911 considerable number of public houses closed. Not content, with this the Cambridge Licencing Reform committee petitioned for closure of more in certain areas of town. Several pubs closed following the Great War. They included the "True Blue" in 1919 & in 1924 the Black Swan" in Guildhall Street was converted to Fisher House.

The 1930's saw the closure of the "Grapes Inn" in Castle Street, the famous "Three Tuns" where it was rumoured Dick Turpin had lodged, the "Bell" in Peas Hill - demolished for the rebuilding of the Guildhall - and "one of the best known hostelries amongst older generations of country folk", the "Carriers Arms" in St Tibbs Row.

But the decade also saw new pubs such as the "Milton Arms" and the "British Queen" on Histon Road opened to cater for the expanding town. In 1959 the "Weathervane" became the first new pub to be built & opened since the War, it was quickly followed by others on the new Arbury estate, "Carlton Arms" & "Snow Cat". The 1960s saw the opening of the "Racehorse", "Queen Edith" & "Plough and Harrow" for more new areas.

In the old areas rebuilding found the "Free Press" standing alone in an area of demolition, one of 239 licenced houses to be found in 1962 whilst the "Man on the Moon", Norfolk St opened, replacing a pub demolished on East Rd.

Losses included "Angel", Market Hill (1962), "Pelican", East Rd (1967), "Criterion", Market Passage (1968) to be followed shortly by the "House of Commons", "Wheatsheaf", Castle Hill & the "Rhadegund", King St. whilst protestors were by now fighting to keep the "Milton Arms" open.

The licenced trade were worried by the decision in 1967 to grant a licence to supermarkets to sell drinks and by the 1978 decision to grant Christ's college a full beer licence for its college bar; previously they had operated under Vice Chancellor's wine licence which felt not to cover beer or spirits. They also felt that wine bars would make city pubs redundant. Yet others mourned the passing of Millers Wine parlour on Kings Parade in 1972 though it reopened as "Shades" in 1974.

Closures continued in the 1970s including the "Britannia", "Old English Gentleman", "Brewers Arms" & "King William IV" on Newmarket Rd but the 'Real Ale' movement became active, organising Beer Festivals and in 1976 reopening the "Salisbury Arms" which had closed three years previously.

More recently the "British Queen" briefly became "Bumpers" - a "fun pub" and the "Racehorse" changed to "Hoofers" with flashing lights and loud music. But nobody will

reopen the "Bun Shop"; it remains just a fond memory for many older drinkers and an odd name for the rest.

Stories from a year - 1976

Waiting for water was the memory during the 11-month drought of 1976

Hobson's Brook dried up for possibly the first time and in various parts of the country the water tap did little but gurgle and gasp as supplies ran out.

The hardship was temporary but gave an insight into life just a few years ago for in 1945 an official county council report showed that less than half of the rural homes had piped water, the others had to work for every drop of water at the pump. Often this meant a considerable walk, one in five households were over 100 yards away from a pump, and on arrival there might be a queue.

On the other hand the luxury of a pump opposite your front door could also be a handicap as from six o'clock in the morning -onwards there was an almost incessant squeaking and rattling as people waited for water. Sometimes the man of the house on his way to work would fill the family water-cart and leave it covered for the children to fetch later. Others who could not afford such a luxury would waddle home carrying the heavy pails swinging from the hooks at the ends of chains from broad wooden yokes.

People had their own theories about pumping; some pushed the handle down to its lowest point and leant on it, forcing the water out by a series of short downwards thrusts. Others let it rise to the highest point and then jerked it down to nose level, both hands clasping over the handle.

Whichever way it was a puffing business after a few minutes. It took fourteen full strokes to fill an average size bucket at Lt Eversden, recorded E.M. Barraud, who could judge it to the half-inch even in complete darkness. Not that she went to the pump after dark, except in an emergency - only amateurs or natives afflicted with town visitors given to endless ablutions went to the pump at night

Cambridge itself had enjoyed the luxury of piped water since the monks laid a pipe in 1325 from the Madingley Road, whilst the Conduit named after Hobson the carrier had begun in 1610. The Victorians had passed an Act of Parliament in 1853 which authorised the establishment of works to supply the inhabitants of the University and Borough of Cambridge with water. Additional supplies were obtained from a pumping station at Fulbourn which opened in 1891 but in 1907 these were found to be contaminated with sewage from the Asylum.

Country folk well knew the difficulties of pure water; in 1889 a newspaper editorial reported one village's water as "covered with a green slimy substance and full of living creatures; to add to its high flavour most of the liquids from the adjoining farmyard closets and pig sties are drained into it".

That year residents of Fen Ditton spent £105.14.7 sinking a new well following several outbreaks of fever. In 1910 the County Medical Officer of Health surveyed the public water supply in several of his villages; Croxton well was polluted and was not worth spending money on, five wells at Willingham were also contaminated but there was no better supply

available. In the Swavesey area there had been frequent blockages in the public supply and the County were negotiating with the East Hunts Water Company who had installed large pumps at Bourn in 1892.

Drought in 1859 had dried up virtually all the wells at Linton - the greatest scarcity the old men could ever remember whilst in 1921 as temperatures rose to 136 degrees the Littleport water supply gave out and lorries had to be brought in from Ely, men women and children queuing for water at a half-penny a bucket.

In view of all that the problems of 1976 and 1983 when water workers strikes once more brought stand-pipes into the streets were of little concern. Miss Barraud felt in 1945 that pumping was a sociable business; in just half-an-hour you could see almost everybody, hear all the news and more than all the scandal, sentiments not echoed by those who learned the hard way that water from the tap can be a luxury.

Stories from a year 1977...

June 1977 was Jubilee month; Cambridgeshire went red, white & blue with people reported as dressing, decorating, drinking, planting, buying selling and even eating anything that stays still long enough to have a Union Jack printed on it. Everything that is except the official Cambridge Jubilee Year souvenir books, even at half price some thousand copies were left. Nor did everybody join in the spirit of Jubilee as the original bill of £500 for street decorations soared to £988 because of the cost of replacing vandalised bunting.

The planning for it all had of course taken some months; Stapleford was not alone in starting its deliberations in October the year before. They like many others were having to contemplate just what sort of events ought to be organised and, again like many others, decided to include Jubilee sports, decorated vehicles and a Street party for the youngsters, with other celebrations for the not so young, who could actually remember the Coronation in 1953 and even the previous Silver Jubilee way back in 1935.

Cambridge itself sought inspiration from even further back, basing its programme of sports on Midsummer Common on the rustic sports that were themselves revived for Queen Victoria's coronation. Supermarket Trolley races had been omitted from that earlier celebration but were included now along with more traditional fireworks, bands and parades

"J" stood, it was said for "Jollity, Joy and Jubilation". Almost inevitably it also stood for "Juveniles", the children's day, to be remembered in years to come as "the day I went to the street party and the sandwiches got soggy and the crisps got soggy"; in fact "all the food was soggy so we did not eat it". The inside story of the Cambridge Jubilee was published by children from Kings Hedges School in the July 1977 issue of their magazine "Rooftops".^ _

Some of the pupils watched the Queen on the telly; there in the golden chariot was the lady "nobody hates, because she is nice to everyone and everything ... she even cares for the insects which is very nice of her".

But there were other things to do besides watching telly. Street parties had been arranged, at Crathern Way 300 people came, but the weather was unkind. "It was raining and we had some nice food and first of all we went to the Magic Man and then we had the food. It was still raining so we went to the community centre to have our food. All of the food was soggy so we did not eat it". But others had no such scruples "I had two jam tarts and four slices of bread and we had two cakes."^ _

Then there was the Carnival: "it was quite fun and was very exciting". "I was a bear in the carnival. I did a dance; it was scary", "and then the dragon came, scaly back, fiery mouth, then the St George came to the rescue, throwing spears and thrusting swords, then the dragon goes and in comes Robin Hood playing games with his Merry men in the woods". "My mask had a nose like a pig. My brother thought I was a pig when I went by him. When I came home I had a meringue cake with a cherry and a cup of tea". "I was a prince on a float. The floats were lorries decorated with flowers and flags... on the float it was very cold. Every time we went round a corner we nearly fell off". I did not like it one bit because it was freezing cold"

But not all children could play all day: "I got up and I did the washing up, the wiping up and putting away. Then I did the dusting, swept the carpet, then I had a wash. After that I had my breakfast". "I took a Jubilee cake up to an old lady for her tea and I pushed an old lady in the procession and we all got a flag and a red, white and blue lolly"

Food and fun meant thirst. For most it was a glass of orange squash, for others "a drink of coke and a drink of punch and I did not get drunk". But for at least one eleven year old "my mum got us some cider to drink and some cakes as well. I got drunk and I was sick so I went to bed. Next day I was a little bit better and I really enjoyed it".

And so did thousands of others throughout the county and throughout the country in celebration of a Jubilee like no other, and yet like all others.

Stories from a year, 1978

CWN 19.12.89

It was near Christmas 1978 that a remarkable cross section of the Cambridge community gathered in the church of St Mary the Less for a funeral service for a well-known Cambridge personality.

There was a former Dean of Jesus College, a police superintendent, booksellers, shopkeepers, a solicitor, market traders, college staff. They heard an address from the Rev James Owen and they sang hymns. Then they exchanged reminiscences about the man whose service they were attending, paid tribute to his memory and went away.

A regular occurrence in a town like Cambridge perhaps. A distinguished academic, or leading businessman had died it might be thought. But that service was not for this sort of personality, but for a man of no fixed address, who had some 113 convictions, mainly on drinking charges, and who was known to the congregation of 50 as the shabby old man with a beard who sat and drank in the city centre.

Some friends of Trevor Hughes, who'd died at the age of 66 after a heart attack, had not wished to see his death go unmarked and unnoticed by a community which had come to notice him, and some even to love him, in all his years in Cambridge. He was, said some, a personality in an age of conformity. He was, said others, an awkward and difficult old drunkard who cursed and swore at those who passed by as he half, lay propped up against the base of the old fountain in the Market Hill.

He was one of the large community who traditionally made their way to the University town as they tramped the country. In the 1800s a network of Casual Ward was set up between 14 and 20 miles apart where the tramps were given supper and a bed and then worked for 2 hours before leaving to continue their journey. At Cambridge it was reported in 1909 that sometimes all provision for tramps at the workhouse was full and in 1927 with vagrancy soaring after the Great War 117 had been accommodated one night in premises suitable for 60 in the Mill Road workhouse. Two years later a new Casual ward was built at Union Lane Chesterton the

most up-to-date in the country. It had spring mattresses and showers hot and cold water and an expensive electric fumigator holding 80 blankets at a time. The new facility proved popular and numbers increased to 80 a day; extensions had to be added in order to cope. But after a decade it was accepted that the casuals were merely using the wards as a hotel. Numbers had doubled and many strong and healthy men refused the work that was readily available at the time and the Government closed down the wards. With the closure of the workhouse the problem of the homeless did not go away. The Salvation Army White Ribbon Hostel and the Church Army dormitories in Willow Walk were supplemented in 1968 when the Simon Community opened a former pub in East Road as a shelter for misfit dossers and alcoholics where they could live without being institutionalised. But they soon found that the policy of mixing drinkers and non-drinkers was not working and that public hostility was growing. Today in Lion Yard shoppers loaded with Christmas spirits are accosted as they make their way back to their cars whilst young carol singers collecting money for charity see first hand some of the problems they are attempting to alleviate.

Meanwhile the old Mill Road workhouse - where Christmas day had always been made one for its inmates to remember is now starting its new role as a caring home for the elderly sheltered between its walls from the cold of an outdoor night and the discomfort of a Market Hill

Stories from a year by Mike Petty 1979

February was the traditional month for student eccentricity to be given free rein. Thus when Saturday shoppers on the first day of Rag Week saw the damp grass of Parker's Piece covered with prayer mats, heard kneeling students reciting from the Koran as they faced towards Mecca, and watched their procession through the streets they well might wonder whether this was just another money raising stunt.

But this was for real a political demonstration by Iranian students calling for a blessing on the efforts of the Ayatollah Khomeini to overthrow what they described as an "unjust, irresponsible, inhuman and cruel regime" of the Shah of Persia.

It had been 11.30 on the 28th June 1873 when news of the Shah of Persia's imminent arrival was received at Cambridge Guildhall.

Immediately the civic machine swung into action. The town council was hastily convened and the Bull Hotel told to lay on suitable refreshments. Soup and meat, fish and fowl, heaps of patisserie, geles and crèmes, soufflés and cakes were quickly produced.

Horses and vehicles were ordered, including an open carriage drawn by two of the best greys with postillion outriders. Shops shut and bunting appeared from nowhere. Buglers summoned members of the Rifle Volunteers to provide a guard of honour.

The University Vice Chancellor had been informed and immediately he too had acted gathering together such of his distinguished colleagues as were available on that June day. College silver was brought out of store lest the Shah need more refreshment than the Bull could provide.

In just one and a half hours all was ready. The Mayor and Corporation journeyed to the station past windows already packed with people waiting to glimpse such a distinguished entourage. There together with University, the military band and an expectant crowd of 1,500 people they awaited the arrival of the 1.10 special from Crewe.

It was all something of a shock to the Stationmaster who had not been appraised of the visit. Had he known the platform would have been spruced up and he would have worn his best

suit. Slowly everybody became aware that something was wrong. The Shah had arrived at Dover some weeks earlier and was staying at Buckingham Palace where a special telegraph line had been placed at his disposal so he could have direct communication with his wives in Teheran. Perhaps there was a crisis at home in the desert.

Then they realised the telegraph had appeared on the hallmaster's table at the Guildhall: it had not come over the wires: it was all a hoax and even the Mayor joined in the general laughter at the clever ruse that had drawn so many dignitaries to the station on a fools errand.

The visit that never was passed into folklore.

Then in March 1965 the rumour started again only this time he was supposed to be arriving by a Heron of the Queen's flight at Marshall's airport. Quite what his itinerary was nobody really knew - perhaps a stroll along the Backs, a visit to King's and Trinity, and then round off the stay with a pint of beer and game of darts at the Queen's Head, Newton. Some believed it and a crowd of a hundred waited outside King's chapel. Others did not including the Sunday lunchtime regulars in the village pub. But this time it as for real as the thirty pound boost to the pile of pennies being collected to improve the Village hall testify

Stories from a year 1980

In February 1980 headlines proclaimed that a fight was on to save St Clements church, Parishioners were forming an action group to try and stop the church being made redundant.

Their action followed a Diocesan report which recommended merger with other churches as a way of coping with the changing pattern of life in central Cambridge. As the town expanded new churches had been constructed to serve the new communities - St Barnabas, St Philip and in New Cherry Hinton a meeting was held in 1891 which led to the consecration of the nave and chancel of St John's church, although it was to be 1929 before it was completed. St George's off Milton Road was consecrated in 1938 and as post-war housing development increased with it came more churches. Sometimes the plans did not work out. A new church district was created from the parishes of St Andrew the Less and Fen Ditton in 1947 only to be dissolved in 1956, although the name St Stephens was used for the church dedicated in 1962, one of five announced by the Bishop of Ely in 1955. One of these was the Nicholas Ferrar Memorial Church on the Arbury Estate whose foundation stone was laid by Princess Margaret in 1957, and she returned in 1976 to attend a service to celebrate its completion.

However the growth of population which meant new churches were needed was matched by declining congregations elsewhere. In 1958 a Diocesan report recommended that six churches should be declared redundant, including St Michael, St Botolph and St Clement. St Michael's was reconstructed and opened in its new form in 1966. St Peter's which closed 1971 and All Saints amalgamated with Holy Sepulchre in 1973 were both taken over by the Redundant Churches Fund.

But others launched spirited resistance. The parishioners of St. Andrew the Great opposed the proposals, shared their building with the Greek Orthodox Church but finally closed in 1984, although the future of the church building is still subject of debate. The ousted Greek congregation turned to St Clement's who like other congregations were also faced with the expense of maintaining the fabric of the church. It had been erected around 1200 to replace an original wooden building but by 1567 the original west tower was ruinous and taken down. The present tower was paid for from the estate of the antiquarian William Cole who appointed James Essex, one of his executors to do the work. But Essex died soon after Cole and it was not until 1821 that it was built, and then in the wrong place - Cole had wanted it to be erected over the graves of his sisters and not on the street. The new tower was topped by a steeple but by 1928 this was in a dangerous condition and was removed, An appeal for £120,000 was

launched in 1984 although one correspondent considered that the building should be left to fall into decay and that as a ruin it would perform a valuable public amenity - far better as a wilderness garden than as one of the least attractive Cambridge ecclesiastical buildings.

But many others disagreed and so the religious community continues with their own style of traditional worship following the, rituals of the Holy Catholic & Apostolic Church of England with its incense and bells, embroidered surplices and servers with candles in a building that in one form or another has served for over 800 years.

Stories from a year 1981

In March 1981 a new name emerged for an old problem with the announcement that the shopping development centred on the Fitzroy Street area of Cambridge was to be called The Grafton Centre.

It was named after Augustus Henry Fitzroy, the third Duke of Grafton. The Duke had been educated at Peterhouse and became Chancellor of the University in 1768. He had died in 1811 and his name had already been taken for the street that was at that time starting to grow in the open fields of Barnwell that had been inclosed in 1811. Then the straggling buildings in Blucher Row had become Fitzroy Street. Adjacent to it were two streets commemorating a famous carrier and mayor who had a large house on Newmarket Road, James Burleigh.

The area that grew around these streets formed a compact little township separated from the historic centre by a ring of grass – Christ's Pieces and New Square - the latter elegantly laid out with houses between 1825 and 1854. Separated physically from the University centre with its shops serving University needs the local residents found their local needs met in the locality with small-scale shops offering cheaper goods.

Some pointed out that Fitzroy Street was the hardest street in the town to get to - there were Gates at either end and a Cart(w)right in the middle - a punning allusion to the names of shop owners. There was also the Moon and the Starr (more shop names) and when asked about the Sun to complete the heavenly trio young Percy Moon would say - I'm the son - my dad keeps the shop.

Writing in 1976 the late Percy North remembered people like Elijah Tarrant whose delicious ice cream was very popular during Midsummer Fair, Whiteheads the fruiter, Jim Stokes the bakers and a tall building built as a jam factory for Sturton the grocer. One general store was kept by Mr. Austin who could be seen daily taking small quantities of coal on a sack barrow to his many customers - few people could afford to buy a hundredweight at a time although the price was only 1/-. There was a clothes shop owned by Whiteleys where payment could be made "a tanner a week" and a small shop where coffee was sold at half-penny a cup, making it a welcome meeting place for many of the unemployed.

The area was never rich and in winter the former Shakespeare Brewery was opened as a soup kitchen supplying a basin of soup and slice of bread for a penny to the out-of-work with tickets available from grocers for others at twice the price.

There were various other welfare groups including a Home of Mercy "for girls who had taken the wrong path" who were employed at laundry work and attended services at Christ Church where there were special pews for them - and a special gateway from the home into the churchyard so there was no need to go through the street.

But into the area of small scale shopping came enterprising businessmen, one of whom was William Heffer who opened in Fitzroy Street in July 1872 as a stationer and newsagent. Soon he began adding books, mainly for Sunday and day school prizes, expanding into adjacent

premises and opened a sub post-office. But in the 1890s to attract custom from the "other" Cambridge he hit on the idea of offering dons and undergraduates a discount of 25% on their cash purchase of books - matching a similar offer from London publishers. Other Cambridge booksellers were vehement in their opposition and tried to cut off Heffer's supplies from the publishers. In this they failed and had to allow the same discounts to their own customers. But now all shops were competing equally Heffer no longer had the means of enticing buyers into the long walk to his shop. His move from Fitzroy Street into Petty Cury to be nearer the established shopping area was an early indication that the attractions of the Fitzroy Street area were not enough in themselves to secure a viable business

Stories from a Year – 1982

1990 08 30

Midwife to the atomic monster

THE news of an explosion of the first Atom bomb at Hiroshima made headlines around the world in August, 1945.

As first stories of the effect of that bomb came through so Cambridge scientists celebrated the research that had made it possible. The routine research conducted at the Cavendish Laboratory had been led by men who had worked with the late Lord Rutherford whose work on radioactivity had led to the discovery of the nucleus the minute body at the centre of the atom in which enormous energy is imprisoned.

The work of these scientists was one of the great secrets of the war and the men engaged in it pledged to complete and absolute secrecy. Only after the bomb had exploded could it be made known that four members of the Technical Committee had close associations with Cambridge, as had the man who directed the work on the atom bomb. Prof Oppenheimer. As the second bomb devastated Nagasaki and some of the details of destruction became known so local people waited for Japanese capitulation and peace — but also wondered whether Cambridge had been midwife to a monster that might destroy all mankind.

Debate over the role of Cambridge in conflict was nothing new. During the Great War the University's scientific departments were engaged in research with the Cavendish investigating methods of signalling to and from the trenches and working ways of detecting submarines and the Chemical Laboratories developing the new poison gases and inventing the gas mask. In 1937 other Cambridge scientists constructed the Government's recommended "gas proof rooms" in college buildings and semi-detached houses and analysed the effectiveness of the gas masks that had been produced, voicing particular concern about their use with very young children.

In 1951 as Civil Defence authorities laid their plans to protect Cambridge from the result of a nuclear attack the presence of American bases was causing grave concern. Seven years later it came very close to home with the establishment of a Thor missile base at Mepal in 1957 leading to protest marches.

In the event that base survived the Cuba crisis of 1962 by only a year but CND "Spies for Peace" directed public attention to other, more secret, evidence of preparation for nuclear war. The peace movement was given additional boost with the announcement in 1980 that Cruise missiles would be based at Molesworth and by January 1st 1982 a peace camp had been established there.

Meanwhile city and county authorities were engaged in their own nuclear dispute. While one issued leaflets stating that there would be no defence against nuclear weapons the others held exercises on how they would cope with any emergency, civil or military. Once more the

scientist entered the public arena with claims that in the event of a nuclear exchange nearly 500,000 people would die with Cambridge suffering 97 per cent casualties.

Whatever the rights and wrongs, facts and figures, a grim reminder of the reality of war was received in the city in November, 1982. This was when the Mayor was presented with a fragment of roof tile dug up by the children from that first Japanese city to be devastated by the weapon that was born in Cambridge

Stories from a year - 1983

In 1983 a building in a backwater sold for over £1,000,000 and County Hall passed into history.

It was in Hobson Street that in 1914 the fledgling County Council had opened its first purpose-built headquarters. It had not been their first choice but the Town Council had refused to let them back into the buildings facing Market Hill which once had served as the site for both county and borough administration, the Guildhall being tucked away behind the older Shire House. When in 1842 new Assize Courts had opened on Castle Hill the Town Council expanded into the now-vacant front building, glad of the -extra space. But then in 1888 a massive reorganisation of local government established County Councils giving them new powers and responsibilities.

The new administration found Castle Hill too far out of the town, somewhere else was needed for council meetings and office staff. The officials were installed in rooms scattered throughout the town centre and formal Council Meetings were held in the Guildhall. For a while peace prevailed. Soon however the two councils found themselves at loggerheads; Cambridge wanted to expand its area, to take in Chesterton and parts of Coton, Trumpington, Cherry Hinton and Fen Ditton; the County objected. As violent debates echoed around the Council chamber so the relations between the two hit rock bottom. This was no time for a joint building operation though both desperately needed new offices. So in 1912 the old Hobson Street Methodist Chapel was bought as the site for the new County Hall; it opened two years later to the chagrin of the Town whose own plans for Guildhall rebuilding had been blocked by Ratepayers from the newly assimilated Chesterton area.

Now new battles erupted for expanded Cambridge felt itself large enough to be allowed to run all its own affairs and not have to pay rates to the upstart County Council. Once more they won the debate though this time their plans were defeated -by tactical voting in Parliament in 1914. By 1928 the County Council were finding themselves once more strapped for space. Eyes turned to Castle Hill where the old Gaol, whose last prisoners had moved out in 1916, was being used as a store for the Public Record Office. Thousands flocked to visit the Condemned Cell in 1930 before demolition started, the bricks being reused for the new Shire Hall that opened on the site in 1932.

The Town Council were furious - yet new offices for the County whilst they were stuck in their old building. This time they would rebuild - but where? A report which recommended abandoning the central area for a site on Parkside was finally rejected. The inevitable opposition that once more erupted was dismissed. Buildings on Peas Hill were pulled down and new offices put up, then the old Shire House was demolished and the present Guildhall erected. The join between the two stages can be seen to this day.

On Castle Hill the old Assize Courts finally vanished in 1953 but plans for additional offices on the site were defeated. Instead a new storey was added on the existing Shire Hall and as paperwork increased both county and city bought or built new accommodation for their expanding workforce. Meanwhile in Hobson Street other councils and officials were

continuing to provide valuable services to their communities without attracting headlines. When the sale of County Hall was announced few remembered the building, let alone the battles that had been fought from there in the early years of the County Council.

Stories from a year 1984

In 1984 a little boy called Ben hit the headlines. Two years old he was already living on borrowed time and would certainly die without a liver transplant. Nobody had performed such surgery on a child so young but it could be done - provided a donor liver could be found.

In desperation the mother picked up the telephone and called "That's Life" and within hours help - in the form of a television film crew - was on its way. What happened next was recounted in the BBC book "Ben; the story of Ben Hardwick" which was published in 1985. It tells how next morning the programme office was as chaotic as usual with plans for the following show. A balloon manufacturer was offering a giant inflatable vicar to fly over a church, a con man they had been tracking for six months had been arrested and there was the next round of street interviews to arrange. Programme presenter Esther Rantzen was concerned about the Ben story; "How does Ben look" she asked, "Gorgeous" was the reply. As the resulting book records; "That is the main hurdle crossed. If Ben looks appealing, the point of the story will come home with even more impact".

Stories of illness and its cure have always had an appeal beyond the merely medical. When Elizabeth Woodcock of Impington was discovered having survived her eight days being buried in the snow in 1799 the same issue of the newspaper contained an advertisement for a portrait of the poor lady and for the book which her doctor was intending to publish on the subject. In 1855 the gentry and clergy in the vicinity of Stapleford had flocked to the home of Sarah Carter, dubbed the "Sleeping Beauty", who had been confined to her bed for thirty years and once slept for seventeen weeks. Her mother "has been frequently offered large sums of money by strangers for a personal view of the deceased; but this her mother refused".

Those who could cure were people to be venerated. One such was Dr. Brodnum who visited Cambridge in 1790 and produced testimonials to his powers, William Royston, shoemaker of Green Street, had been afflicted with scurvy and unable to sit on a chair, the son of Mr. Cheeswright, a Littleport shopkeeper had been in a decline for some time. Mr. Clark of Wilburton had lost the use of both his legs entirely - all had been cured by the great man as each would testify. Others claimed to make the deaf hear and the blind see.

Meanwhile legitimate medical men were investigating new techniques. A convicted murderer was cut down from the gallows at Cambridge castle and taken to the University chemical lecture rooms where he was subjected to electrical shocks to try and test such treatments could simulate breathing. A detailed report appeared in the Cambridge Chronicle for August 13th 1819 which went on to record how hundreds of spectators had taken advantage of the opportunity to view the body in the room in which the experiments had taken place.

Generally however developments were taking place away from the public gaze. But the resulting triumphs were heralded - hole in the heart operations, the first kidney graft and liver transplants. But new developments encountered new problems and those faced with the choice between high-tech, high-cost medicine and the needs of the very young or very old had unenviable decisions to make. Public funding for a body scanner at Addenbrooke's in 1981 showed what could be achieved with the support of the public.

But no money could buy a kid a liver, perhaps a television appeal could show that a lost young life could allow another young life to continue. And so it proved, within weeks a donor had been found. Millions followed Ben's progress. Then, when the story seemed to

have passed its peak a member of the TV team glimpsed the headlines on a Cambridge Evening News vendors board. "Liver baby Ben dies". Away from television lights a life had faded away but the hope it represented would live on.

Stories from a year, 1985

"Katrina and the Waves" made musical history in 1985 by becoming the first Cambridge based pop group to achieve a Top-10 hit with their single "Walking on Sunshine". That year also saw the first Cambridge Rock competition, as the town came to grips with the music its youngsters wanted to hear. It followed years when the fear of excessive noise had outweighed Councilor's appreciation of the sound with concerts in the Corn Exchange and on Midsummer Common called off for fear of excessive decibels.

However the complaint of the new fangled music is not only a problem of the 1980s. In 1908 people were complaining that "the gramophone nuisance of a fine evening is quite appalling", although by 1914 there was considerable demand for records of the latest dance fad - the Tango. The 1920s saw a series of concerts organised by Millers Music shop, the thirties a number of bands, including Stirlingaires - formed by employees of Marshall's and Shorts - and Percy Cowell who opened the great new entertainment venue, the Dorothy cafe in 1931, to be succeeded by Reg Cottage in 1949.

Dancing at the Dorothy became a popular pastime, though the Rex Ballroom was another popular venue, organising a jitterbug competition during the dark days of 1943, Guildhall dances were sedate affairs until the coming of the new Rock 'n' Roll music when jiving was banned in 1956 after complaints that youngsters were even jiving to waltzes. Ever quick to respond the Rex Ballroom announced it would allow rock and roll sessions and the Kinema showed the film magistrates had wanted banned - "Rock around the clock", going on next year, 1958, to install a juke box.

Then came the great period of pop music in Cambridge as the travelling groups made the Regal cinema one of their bases, Cliff Richard in 1959 attracted vast crowds who blocked Regent Street. He returned next year as did Adam Faith attracting this review from the newspaper correspondent ; "the show was deplorably uninteresting, but the audience gave a magnificent performance" - referring to the crowds of screaming teenagers sparsely mixed with incredulous and slightly-dazed parents. Not content just to listen a group of students organised a 25 hour Jive session, aiming for a world record for non-stop dancing. In 1961 the groups were back. The appearance of the Ted Heath dance band at the Dorothy could not compete in media attention with the drama as Billy Fury was forced to cut short his concert owing to a throat infection and collapsed next day, being rushed to Addenbrooke's hospital for treatment. It did not prevent his return the following year along with Cliff, Adam and Phil Everley.

Then in 1963 came a "four man rock group with weird hairstyles as a gimmick who sang and played their current hits 'Love me Do' and 'Please Please Me'. Although accompanied by Chris Montez, Tommy Roe, Debbie Lee and the Viscounts the show was "not the best Cambridge audiences had seen", but for many of the fans who queued to see the Beatles it was a -night to remember. They returned in November under a police escort, smuggled in a Black Maria into the Downing Site laboratories. The queue for the Regal cinema venue started at 10.30. the Red Cross had dozens of men waiting for fainting and hysterical fans as 4,000 packed to see their idols, though any sounds they made were drowned by the screams of the audience. By comparison the Rolling Stones or P.J. Proby (whose show in 1965 was dropped because of his smutty act) were small beer.

Now with the Junction, a new centre for pop music, perhaps the great days might return. Though one will probably never see such block-busting touring shows as those of the mid 1960s when there were so many stars appearing one night that many had to change in the University Arms Hotel and run across the road to the stage.

Stories from a year 1986, by Mike Petty

American planes above Cambridgeshire countryside can convey mixed emotions.

In 1945 the sound of the Flying Fortresses were as much a part of the Cambridge war effort as the pilots and crew who made the town their centre for rest and recuperation between flights from the bases in the surrounding countryside.

The "National Geographic Magazine" of September 1936 had conveyed to its American readership something of the atmosphere of Cambridge where dons lectured in academic dress, Newnham undergradettes played cricket with long skirts reaching below the tops of their pads and fit young men having breakfasted on rare steak attempted to bump each other in boats on the river.

The colour photographs revealed ancient courts where students lived in former Convent buildings and the "smooth Cam's silent waters reflect a golden willow tree before palace-like Clare College". That river ran beside prosaic Jesus lock "dressed up with a gay flower bed" whilst a "barefoot girl punts picnickers up the Cam to bathing places near Grantchester" whose picturesque beauty had been preserved by their countrymen: "When it was proposed to build an express highway across the pastoral meadows between Cambridge and Grantchester a few years ago, an American Trust Fund purchased the construction rights and thus preserved the rural retreat".

Such a place was worth fighting for and five years later other American visitors were discovering Cambridge for themselves. Local people were urged to help make them feel at home: they were here for the duration of the war, with no chance of home leave, some of them were shy. Residents were urged to invite them home for tea but not to invite the whole street in to view the Americans.

In 1942 the University instituted a professorship in American History, intended to explain the USA to undergraduates. Frank Dobie of the University of Texas at Austin, took up the appointment. His first impression of Emmanuel College of John Harvard was distinctly chilly, even in September rooms were cold and coal scarce. But soon the warmth of his welcome made up for that.

He presented his passport to the police station and received his identity card. He obtained food coupons and surrendered them to the college buttery. In return he would get an ounce of butter, an ounce of oleomargarine, and a small amount of sugar which would be placed by his breakfast plate each morning along with his monthly ration of a pint of jam or marmalade. More formality attended other meals with diners in gowns, Latin grace and waiter service to be followed in the Combination room with port wine, coffee and only then tobacco.

His experiences were recorded in the April 1946 edition of the "National Geographic" but by then other Americans had themselves gained first hand experience of Cambridge life through the courses organised for them at "Bull College" the Bull Hotel, base of the American Red Cross, whilst they waited repatriation.

Many more have followed in their footsteps through Summer Schools organised by the University Extra Mural Board combining a study vacation with the opportunity to become part of the Cambridge academic community, living and dining in college unlike the large numbers of independent travellers for whom the city is a brief pause on their itinerary.

But the threat of war interrupted the American migration in 1986 after American jets from local bases had made their raids on Libya. Thoughts on how to restrict numbers from causing chaos turned to how to mitigate the financial disaster caused by their absence. Hotels reported mass cancellations and British tourist authorities mounted a publicity campaign to win back the faint hearted Americans.

Part of that package was an expenses paid trip for travel writers who would be shown the sights that had entranced early scribes, although perhaps "Main Street" in Trumpington" might no longer have quite the impact it had fifty years before when green gas lamps were still in use, and "cottages with thickly thatched dormer windows suggest prim old ladies in poke bonnets". Nevertheless it worked.

Next year the headlines were once more of fears of saturation and restriction and the impact of American jets this time landing thousands more visitors at nearby Stansted airport

Mike Petty Stories from a year- 1987

In March 1987 they admitted what had always been known that cycles dominate Cambridge traffic when the street narrowing in the central area that had started the previous August was confirmed. With no room for motor vehicles to overtake bicycles would regulate the speed of progress.

But the speed of cycles themselves were once the source of concern as a correspondent in 1904 recorded. "A few years ago the bicycle was looked upon by pedestrians as a real terror and accidents were frequent. Those that grew up with the machine now simply regard it as one of the ordinary dangers but still watch out for the "wheeler" who comes scorching by at the phenomenal speed of 20mph".

By then Cambridge should have been used to the things there was a record that as early as 1847 somebody in Cambridge had a giant tricycle with a 12 foot wheelbase whilst one man claimed to have ridden the first bike in the town in 1863. Robert Taylor of Soham was said to be one of the pioneers of the machine. When about 18years old he had built a tricycle that could be propelled by the rider. Later he came upon a woodcut published in the " Illustrated London News" which depicted a man riding on two wheels. Local folk laughed at the idea but the young man persisted. He made two very light wheels of wood with wooden spokes and an iron rim. Pieces of old iron were fashioned into the main frame the front fork alone weighing ten pounds. It was complete in 1868 and two years later he rode it to London where, it was said, it created a sensation. John Howes also claimed to have built a boneshaker in 1868 after seeing one in the Paris Exhibition before going on to build their own "Granta" cycles.

In 1931 W.J. Taylor wrote of an early machine that he had hired from Messrs Dean Bros of East Road at the rate of 1d an hour in the early 1870s. He went on to recall a road race from Oxford to Cambridge in 1877 which caused immense excitement and led to the formation of the Bicycle Union which assisted in the drafting of the Highways Amendment Act of 1879 with byelaws relating to bicyclists.

Various rules were made to govern the machines. In 1904 they were allowed to ride on various paths over the commons, by 1908 the council were considering banning them from

Senate House Passage but when the first one way restrictions were introduced in Market Street and Petty Cury in 1925 there was one category of traffic that could go against the flow as they have done legally or illegally ever since

Cyclists complained of motorists and were seeking their own cycleways in 1913

As pneumatic tyres were developed so they suffered other problems in 1906 one particular cat was reported to be adept at puncturing them as people biked past and in 1910 the flints put on the road to provide footholds for horses during snow were also complained of for similar reasons

Machines were expensive a second-hand machine sold for 35/- (1.75) in 1910 and various firms aped Dean's idea of hiring them out. One such was Herbert Robinson who by 1911 were doing good business hiring to undergraduates, and demonstrated good business sense or good luck when in 1938 they took delivery of 500 machines just before a bus strike.

Bicycle thieves were soon on the scene with a professional gang being detected shipping stolen bikes to London by train in 1910 and having a drastic effect on employment since even then it was claimed that house prices were so high that ordinary folk had to live far from the centre and needed the machines to get to work. Although necessary they were also a nuisance. "Pavements are full of parked machines whilst college courts are empty" .A quote not from the editorials of March 1990 but from the Cambridge Daily News of 5th March 1910! It went on to say "it will be 20 or 30 years before the problem is solved" perhaps a trifle optimistic

Stories from a year 1988

Itinerant traders and musicians are part of the Cambridge scene that receives mixed reaction. Shopkeepers with high overheads express annoyance when street vendors set up a Pitch outside, their premises selling, a similar commodity. In 1973 ice cream sellers were being criticised for extortionate prices – 4 single ices cost 50p. from one stall whereas a super-large cone on Newmarket racecourse was 15p. compared to 9p in central Cambridge. The prices were considered outrageous, since the introduction of zero-rated VAT meant that prices should have gone with a choc bar now down to 5p.

The noise of the vendors prompted complaints in 1911 when hot-cross sellers were crying their wares at 5.30 a.m. though this nuisance had abated by 1915. The call "Hot-cross buns, one a penny, two a penny, hot cross buns" was no longer applicable since price rises had meant there were no halfpenny buns to be had. The vendors, would, said one correspondent, go the same way as the muffin man – and few would mourn their parting. Nighttimes could be disturb by the "trotter man" selling his wares well into the dark and the sound of the newspaper vendor's cry is said to have even found its way into Kings College chapel and been echoed on the organ by Charles Stanford.

Some traders were "characters" who attracted public support. The death in 1910 of George Randell a blind man who lived on Honey Hill and sold matches at street corners was remarked upon - not least because he was so tall that his coffin had to be made seven feet long.

But it is perhaps the street musician who provokes the most mixed reaction with complaints of a constant procession of them in Mill Road in 1922. Part of the architects brief for the Lion Yard redevelopment was that it should become a place of entertainment for shoppers and, since its opening, it has attracted a wide range of buskers. Many are of the screech and yell variety with little or no talent whose only ability is to discourage window shopping and encourage a turnover of shop assistants whose life is made miserable by their limited and oft

repeated repertoire. Occasionally however crowds of shoppers will stop in their tracks to applaud the talents of the musicians performing.

Two Cambridge lads made a reputation for themselves by playing classical music in the streets in 1949 and the formula was repeated in 1975 by Dag Ingram and Michael Copley, students at Churchill college who within a year were attracting crowds of 200 to their performances in Petty Cury whilst even more were soon queuing to watch them in concert halls around the world. Their success was anticipated by Gerry Bol, a one man band who himself has featured on television, both for his musicianship and for his arrest in 1978 on charges of obstruction during a crackdown on itinerant traders.

The Council's concern for the cleanliness of foodsellers stalls, for the smell and litter that may be generated, and for the increasing numbers of vendors led to constant debate and correspondence culminating in the licensing of a number of pitches which came into force in March 1988. Two months later -there was a new face on the music scene as Jeremy Sams replaced Dag Ingram in the duo which started its career on the streets of central Cambridge and spread the reputation of Cambridge Busking worldwide.

Stories of a Year - 1989

In March 1989 central Cambridge is undergoing great change.

There is demolition and rebuilding on Market Hill, involving the loss of a central cinema. There are plans for a new central superstore and a revamped Market. The incessant debate on parking continues and there are suggestions to redevelop at Parkside.

Can there have ever been a period like it? The answer is simply yes - March 1930.

There was said the paper, "the usual rebuilding activity in the centre of town". It centred on precisely the same site as today, with work in progress on building the Victoria Cinema that has been recently demolished. New vistas of Holy Trinity church were being opened, not least from Petty Cury where much of the north side was being knocked down to make way for a new superstore - Boots.

That development continued in Sidney Street and soon shoppers would be looking across the road to more building as that side was itself redeveloped for Woolworths and, shortly, Marks and Spencer. Even the traditional Market was the subject of debate. Then, as now, there were plans to revamp it. Plans were canvassed to move the stalls into the Corn Exchange and so release more space for parking in the town centre.

Whilst motorists were still getting used to the changes wrought by the creation of the New Square car park other plans were already being debated that would severely curtail central traffic - in July it was to be announced that six colleges were to ban undergraduate cars and motorbikes.

Then, as now, Councillors were casting their eyes towards Parkside seeing it as a suitable site for redevelopment - traffic considerations making it seem the best place to put the new Guildhall because of congestion in the centre.

But that was all in 1930. It was the start of a decade of change that left residents bemoaning the loss of old Cambridge as the townscape disappeared before their eyes. It ended with war - a war whose headlines once more fill the pages of the Cambridge papers.